

An Argument for Federally Funded Universal Preschool

Maggie Hambleton, Class of 2016
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Professor Pickett
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Abstract

Public education is the strongest way to address our country's poverty as an institution grounded in both political and moral reasoning. However, our current school system is flawed with inequality. I find that inequalities in education begin even before children enter kindergarten and the school system is never able to overcome this initial negative impact. I propose Universal Preschool to combat these early inequalities. A universal program would provide social, health, and educational benefits to the participant as well as providing benefits to their families and society at large. I address the major critiques of this proposal and show that while their arguments have validity, the potential costs of Universal Preschool are considerably smaller than the potential benefits.

Introduction

During the late 1900s and the early 21st century it has become increasingly apparent that individuals from low-income families and minority families are falling behind their wealthier and white peers in college attainment, labor market opportunities and incomes, and eventual adult outcomes. This has led to low mobility in the United States and a perceived unequal American Dream. By focusing on college costs and the immediate roadblocks to college many policy makers and researchers address improving college attainment. However the inequalities observed at the college level are merely symptoms of inequalities rooted in individuals' early childhood environment and development. If policies address the root of inequalities, benefits to society will be much greater than those that attempt to provide band-aid solutions later in life.

Imagine Jackson, a three-year old boy who lives with his two working parents in Rockbridge County, Virginia. His mother is a bank teller, earning about \$25,000 annually, and his father earns about \$26,000 working as a construction laborer. Before taxes and transfers, his family earns \$51,000 a year, just over the national median family income in 2010 of \$49,445 (U.S. Census Bureau). For a family of three, their income is over 200% of the poverty line, making them ineligible for assistance from the federal government (Cleveland Metro Bar Association). To pay for a full-time, center based early childhood development program would cost the family about \$10,000, almost 20% of their income (Naccerra: Virginia). As a result, Jackson ends up staying in the care of unemployed family and friends, passes to whoever has available time. He does not have an opportunity to interact with children his own age.

Two years later Jackson enters kindergarten. He has difficulty following directions from teachers as well as sharing and communicating with his peers, as this is the first time he has been in a formal educational setting. Academically, Jackson is behind his peers and struggles in both reading and math.

Jackson is never able to overcome his initial lack of structure and education even with special services at school. Though he was retained in third grade, so it was a year late, Jackson graduated from high school. He did not choose to pursue college and instead began working as a construction laborer just as his father had. In a few years he fell in love and married a young woman working a minimum wage job and they had a child. Jackson is now faced with the same dilemma that his parents were troubled with years before, *how does he provide his*

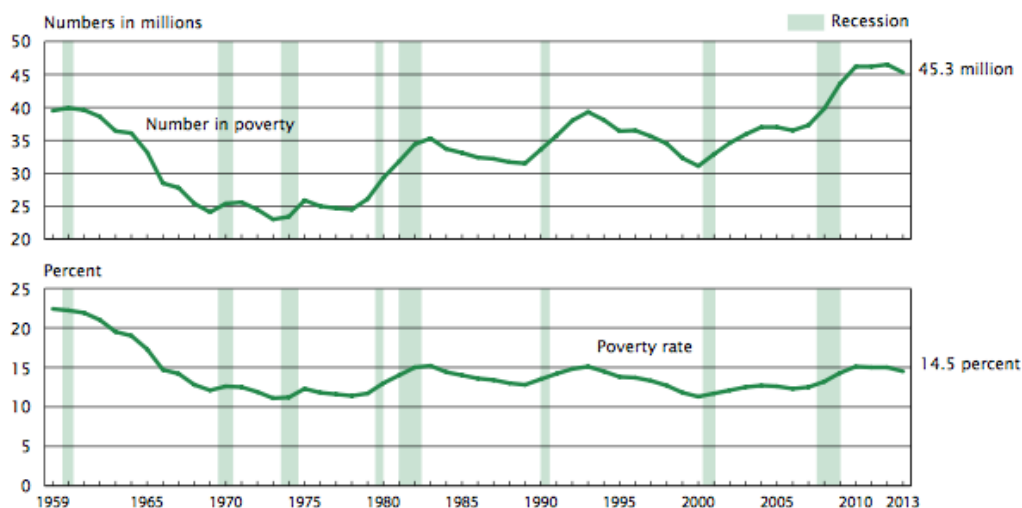
child with an early education when both he and his wife are working and they do not qualify for any aid?

For children like Jackson, the vast benefits of preschool and early childhood development programs are out of reach. Though the federal government has recognized the value of these programs, they are only available for the poorest in society. As I will address later, the federal government is not providing assistance to all those who are eligible even with these narrowly defined eligibility definition. I argue that the government has a responsibility not just to provide federal preschool to poor children, but to all children, many who are unable to access the benefits of these programs due to the financial barrier as well as the market failure of having high-quality programs outside of high income neighborhoods.

The first portion of my paper will address recent trends in poverty in the United States. I will then go on to explain why the government has to take an active role in fighting for the welfare of its citizens and then finally show that the best way to promote and protect this welfare is through an extended public school system. An additional early year of mandated public education will not only increase educational attainment for children leading to better adult outcomes but will also provide child care for families with working parents while encouraging interaction between individuals of all socioeconomic status.

Current Poverty and Recent Trends in U.S.

Figure 4.
Number in Poverty and Poverty Rate: 1959 to 2013



Note: The data points are placed at the midpoints of the respective years. For information on recessions, see Appendix A. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see <http://ftp2.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps/techdocs/cpsmar14.pdf>. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 1960 to 2014 Annual Social and Economic Supplements.

Poverty in the United States is currently measured by the Official Poverty Measure, which was designed by Mollie Orshansky in the late 1950s, defines poverty as anything less than three times a minimum basket of food, adjusted for inflation (Hoynes et al 2006). Soon after, in 1964, President Johnson declared a national “War on Poverty” (Council of Economic Advisors).

In 1964 the poverty rate was 19.0% with over 36 million individuals in poverty. Ten years later the rate had decreased to 11.2%, by 1984 some of these strides disappeared when the rate grew to 14.4%. From 1984 to 1994 the rate increased by 0.1% showing very little transformation. After the turn of the century the poverty rate failed to measure drastic changes as the rate was 12.7% and the most recent data from 2013 shows that 45.3 million individuals, or 14.5% of the population, was in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau). Figure 4 shows a graphical representation of these figures. From the 1960s to 1970 there is a visible decrease in the poverty rate, but it has remained rather stagnant over the last four decades. However, the top portion of the figure shows the number of people in poverty, which has been increasing since 1980 as a result of the growing U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau).

I would also like to specifically address recent child poverty trends in the United States. From 2000 to 2007 the number of children living in poverty increased annually (Moore et al. 2009). In 2008, the country rank 36th out of 41 developed countries in terms of child poverty according to UNICEF (Ingraham 2014). At that point, one-third of the nation’s children lived in households that were earning below 60% of the national median income, which was \$52,029 (Ingraham 2014; U.S. Census Bureau). Most recent data from 2013 shows that children made up 23.5% of the country’s 316 million people. Of these children, 19.9%, or 14.7 million, was living in poverty. Additionally, 1 in 5 children under the age of 6 were in poverty at a rate of 22.2% (U.S. Census Bureau). This rate became 55% when the focus is narrowed on related children under the age of 6 living in female-headed households (U.S. Census Bureau).

The observed trends in both overall and child poverty in United States paint a desperate image. The country continues to pour federal funds into various anti-poverty programs, but due to the lack of success public support for these programs is falling short. At this time in our country, more than ever, policy makers must identify the most efficient way to utilize taxpayer dollars to create a significant impact on our country’s poverty. Though it may seem natural that the government should hold the responsibility of reducing poverty within its borders, many individuals believe this responsibility is held by individuals themselves as well

as the private market. I will now address why our government has a moral responsibility to work towards eradicating poverty.

What is the Government's Role in Eliminating Poverty?

Why does our nation's government have to take actions to diminish the poverty described above? Some may argue that our government's actions are unnecessary due to the fact that those individuals' poor decisions and actions are determining their position in society. However it appears that the majority of people acknowledge that factors outside an individual's hands may be at play in determining one's social position. Additionally, these factors may be completely random or a result of historical injustices (for example racism). These factors may include family background, natural disasters, and institutional effects.

Education and Political Obligations

The idea that individuals are not completely responsible for their situation is not new and has existed since the founding of our country. America's separation from Great Britain was due to many factors, but one leading influence was harbored discontent from the Enlightenment period in Europe, which questioned long standing social norms of hierarchy. At this time, many of the great thinkers including John Locke, Montesquieu and Rousseau brought to light the importance of individual freedom (Democratic Values Online). From this environment came the idea of equality. Though the concept may have been viewed differently than we do today the founding fathers still understood the importance of equality and chose to solidify it for generations to come and create a country rooted in this ideal.

On July 4th, 1776 thirteen colonies of the new world chose to unanimously declare independence from Britain and created the United States of America. This action was done through the Declaration of Independence, a document approved by representatives of each of these thirteen colonies. A key legacy of this document has been its position on equality "we hold these truths to be self-evident," it reads "that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness" (Declaration of Independence). The declaration also explicitly says that it is the role of the government to protect these rights and when it fails to do so the people are responsible for correcting these injustices.

It is written in the preamble of the United States Constitution that "We the People of the United States in Order to form a more perfect Union...promote the general Welfare...do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America". James Madison, who is attributed with writing the Constitution, found it important to include that the government to be established through the Constitution was one in place to protect the well-being of its

citizens. In comparing this statement with those expressed in the Declaration of Independence, it makes logical sense to state that promoting and protecting the welfare of citizens includes protecting and promoting their basic rights of “Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness”.

By looking throughout our country’s history it is obvious that there is the necessity to establish and promote institution to foster the ideal of opportunity. Additionally, the 14th Amendment to the Constitution adds that all citizens have equal protections and rights in the country. Thus, an institution that promotes opportunity must promote it to all people. I argue that this institution is the public school system.

Education and Moral Obligations

Though political framework is critical, it is also necessary for there to be reasons behind why the political atmosphere acts for certain ideas and not for others. To determine what obligation a society, or government, has for its members, it is essential to look at philosophy.

The famous philosopher John Rawls presented the world with his Theory of Justice in 1971, in which he uses a basic thought experiment to determine the role of government in a society. Rawls presents a world in which individuals are placed in a blind initial position meaning they have no knowledge of their social position, natural talents and weaknesses, or moral influence, called the veil of ignorance (Hartman 110). From this position individuals work to determine what principals of justice they would all agree on to formulate a constitution for the world they will enter. From this experiment Rawls believes that individuals will first focus on the idea that basic rights and duties should be equally distributed regardless of social position or natural skill sets and then address social and economic inequalities as only being accepted if all individuals in society benefit and have equal access (115). As a result of this two-pronged principal, Rawls argues that inequalities of nature are unjustified and should be compensated by the government. The way to view this compensation is through opportunity to overcome the initial inequality that all citizens must have access to, in other words through a federal institution.

The American philosopher Martha Nussbaum also offers insight on how education may be addressed from a moral standpoint. Her approach is the “Capabilities Approach” where a capability is the ability to do something. However, you can have the capability to do something and choose not to do it. Nussbaum presents 10 capabilities, which she calls the “central capabilities,” these include: *life, bodily health, bodily integrity, senses imagination and thought, emotions, practical reason, affiliation, other species, play, and control over*

one's environment (Creating Capabilities 2013). Each of these capabilities must be fulfilled to a minimum threshold, which she leaves up for interpretation, for an individual to live a dignified life. A variety of these capabilities interact with the idea of education. Most obviously perhaps, is capability 4, *senses imagination and thought*, which includes basic education. Without an education, people are unable to use their minds to the full capacity and are unable to think in a critical manner that may be required for this capability. Other capability that is aided by education is *control over one's environment*, capability number 9. This capability can be broken down into two parts: political and material. To have political control, especially in the modern age, one must understand the political environment they are living in as well as be educated about the issues so that they are able to participate in conversation and political processes. The other half of this capability focuses on material, meaning that individuals are able to gain and hold property equally. One key factor behind this idea is that individuals must be able to seek employment without bias so that they have an equal opportunity to gain these material goods in the market place. Education is sometimes seen as *the great equalizer* and while it many not yet meet this goal, it is the avenue for opportunity in our country. There is a strong possibility that without the education system, the capability of *senses imagination and thought*, as well as *control over one's environment* may not be met for many individuals in our country.

U.S. Education System as an Institution

In the United States the public school system has been fought for and established throughout history as the institution that presents opportunities for all citizens to be equal in society and as I will address later, to pursue happiness as promised in the Declaration of Independence. The book *School: The Story of American Public Education* breaks down the history into four distinct and separate periods 1770 - 1900, 1900 - 1950, 1950 - 1980, and 1980 - 2000 (Bernard and Mondale 2001). These divides follow the history in terms of natural divides so I will also adapt them, extending the latter to the present day.

1770 – 1900

Even before our country was established institutions of education existed within its boundaries. While some schools were replicated images of the iconic one room schoolhouse, more forms of organized education also existed. Private schools were available for all ages with dame schools for the youngest followed by grammar schools, usually only for males, a handful of colleges also existed (21).

At that time in history one of the strongest arguments for promoting education was that it could aid in uniting thirteen previously separate colonies into the newly birthed nation with citizens who would be have the abilities to continue the democracy (22). The founding

fathers appeared to agree with this role of education; James Madison stated that “Democratic government without public education is prologue either to farce or tragedy or both” (Douglass 1942). Thomas Jefferson was one of the Revolution’s greatest believers in education, specifically publicly funded education. In 1779, he submitted a proposal to the legislature in Virginia where he was a representative. The proposal called for the creation of “free elementary schools across the state for all white boys and girls, regardless of family income” (Kober 4). Other famous individuals including Benjamin Franklin and President John Adams echoed the beliefs of Madison and Jefferson.

Despite the support of many significant figures during the late 1770s, public education failed to make significant strides until Horace Mann popularized it in the 1830s, (Kober 4). Mann is responsible for the first statewide public school system in the United States, which he built in Massachusetts. Not only did he establish the school system, but Mann rallied citizens around the idea of public schools as promoting unity amongst citizens worried that the new nation would suffer revolutions that were appearing around Europe while also appealing to the high class citizens in the country showing them supporting public schools was a way for them to help those less fortunate than they (Chambliss and Newman 380). Mann was able to leave behind a legacy by presenting education as the means to an ideal society and set the framework for the public school system that exists today.

From the time Mann established the common school system in Massachusetts to the turn of the century public school systems across the country grew immensely and existed across the majority of the country for elementary aged children (Kober 5).

1900 – 1950

In 1918 Mississippi became the last state in the country to enact a compulsory attendance law for elementary aged children (Kober 5). Thus, at this point in history the concern moved from whether or not children should be educated to how they should be educated. The strongest theme throughout this time period is that schools were in place to *Americanize* students whether they be from low-income families or the ever increasing immigrant population (Bernard and Mondale 2001). The World Wars continued to foster an American resistance of immigrants and the public leaned on the schools to unify the increasingly diverse population.

1950 – 1980

While the American public school system had experienced significant growth by 1950 there were groups of citizens, who were unable to fully participate in the school system. While women were allowed to participate in schools with their male peers just at lower rates of

attainment, African Americans were shunned to their own system of schools. This segregated system was legal under the 1896 Supreme Court case *Plessy v. Ferguson*, on the condition that the institutions were equal, coining the famous “separate but equal” phrase. 1954 is famous for the monumental *Brown v. Board of Education Topeka* decision that overturned *Plessy*. In the aftermath of *Brown*, schools began the long road to integration. Black children in the 1950s and 60s paved the way for future generations of minorities but it was not without extreme violence and opposition of many white citizens (142). In the years to come, some areas of the country would embrace integration while other communities fought against it until forced to by pressure from the federal government.

With Lyndon B. Johnson, a former schoolteacher, as president of the United States many of the inequalities of the public education system were exposed (145). Johnson continued the fight for equality in the education by signing the Civil Rights Act of 1964, creating Head Start, and enacting the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. Johnson skillfully tied compliance with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which would include integration, with funding by the ESEA thus finally putting pressure on states to comply with the *Brown* decision. In addition to improving the education system for African Americans these laws amongst others Johnson endorsed, also increased access and quality for poor children, students with disabilities, and women (Kober 6). These three decades were a trying time for the public school system but the decisions made during this time committed the system to equal access and opportunity for all children, not just those who had been historically accepted into the system.

1980 – Present

In the past thirty years, American schools have continued to change. In 1983, the federal government came out with a report entitled *A Nation At Risk*, which outlined the perceived failing of the public school system especially on an international scale. Six years later, President George Bush brought together the governors from all of the states. From this conversation came a variety of national goals in education. As the turn of the century came, business influence and a variety of reforms came to the political spotlight.

Established Goals of the U.S. School System

The history outlined above would not be necessary if there was nothing to gain from these recounts. Throughout the life of school in the United States, the people have formed the institution to fit the needs of the population in respect to what the American citizens believe is morally and politically obligatory. In the early history, democracy was the largest goal of the American school system. Political leaders believed that education was required so that the population would be able to make informed decisions about their country. In the early 1900s

the United States became the melting pot of the world, home to people of all nationalities. At this time, pressure was placed on the schools to Americanize these citizens, giving the schools a new goal: unity. Additionally, the schools were seen as the way to opportunity and the American Dream. The middle part of the century was a difficult time for the American school system. Through strategic planning, the schools were now battlegrounds for equality for African-Americans, women, and disabled students. The momentous strides made during this period solidified equality as a goal for America's public schools. More recently the school systems have relied on these already established goals, expanding them to greater populations, to meet the needs of the American public. The core goals of democracy, unity, opportunity, and equality have held true today, though sometimes their definitions have been changed. Our current public school system, despite its efforts, is not meeting these goals. This effect is having dire impacts for the entire country both on American soil and abroad.

Inequality in the School System

For decades our school system has been struggling to correct a phenomena called the *achievement gap*, which describes the extreme differences between academic achievement in blacks and whites or children of low socioeconomic status and those in high socioeconomic status. Educational attainment is a key factor in determining an individual's adult outcome specifically in the labor market. Thus, low performance in school may lead to low performance in the labor market.

On the whole, blacks and children of low socioeconomic status perform worse than their counterparts. This phenomenon is known as an achievement gap. According to the National Center for Education Statistics "achievement gaps occur when one group of students outperforms another group and the difference is statistically significant" (NCES). According to a NCES report on achievement gaps, white students performed higher than black students on assessments from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP 2009). This racial gap is largest in our country's own capital (Strauss 2012). An achievement gap also exists between students of high and low socioeconomic class. Sean Reardon of Stanford University finds that not only does an achievement gap exist between poor and rich children, but that this gap has increased between 30 and 40 percent over the past thirty years (Reardon 2011). Additionally, he shows that the gap between rich and poor children is almost double the racial achievement gap (Reardon 2011).

However the roots of the achievement gap may occur before a child enters school. Ludwig and Magnuson find that children growing up in households within the top quintile have advantages in their learning environments even before they enter the formal education

system. Well off children are more likely to have immediate access to a computer, books, museums, and libraries. In addition, they are less likely to engage in activities, such as watching television, that are viewed to have a negative effect on children (Ludwig and Magnuson 2007).

Proposal for Publicly Funded Preschool

Thus I propose publicly funded high quality early childhood interventions by expanding the public school system to beginning at age 3 or 4 with mandatory preschool. This program would specifically focus on the goals of opportunity and equality, as it would provide low-income children with comparative opportunities to their better off peers as well as reducing costs for middle and upper class families. Throughout literature the terms childcare, preschool, and early development programs are used synonymously. It is extremely difficult to determine the ultimate goal of a program as many childcare programs have an educational component and many preschool or early development programs provide childcare for the participants' parents. Thus, I will use these terms interchangeably in my discussion.

The major criticism of universal preschool boils down to funding, the program would be too expensive and an inefficient way to spend our country's limited resources. Hard working Americans are resistant to increasing tax rates, yet this option may be the only viable one for funding a universal preschool program. The most recent proposed policy is President Obama's Preschool For All program, which is estimated to require 75 billion dollars in the first decade. The funding for this program would be raised by increased taxes on tobacco sales (U.S. Dept. of Education). This is a prime example of how taxes can increase without the burden being placed on all members of society or being based on a factor (such as income) over which individuals have limited control. While 75 billion may appear a daunting number, it averages out to 7.5 billion dollars a year, per year for the first decade, which is 1.1 billion less than the government currently spends annually on Head Start. Additionally, in 2014 total education spending was only 4 percent of the nation's overall budget (New America). Despite these seemingly exorbitant initial costs, when compared to current educational programs, universal preschool may be significantly lower cost.

Regardless of the strict comparison with other education programs, 75 billion dollars, which could potentially be a low estimate, is an extremely large amount of money. The federal government has an endless variety of programs it can choose to enact and thus will attempt to choose a program that is politically feasible and will generate the largest benefit in terms of it's cost, in other words the program for which the return to a single dollar is the greatest. Universal preschool is the program that the federal government should choose to research,

plan, and implement for our country. I am not arguing for any one type of program, curriculum, or specific details but will present a variety of preschool programs, both experimental and federal, that shed light on the benefits of preschool programs. Recent research has exposed the extreme importance of a child's environment on their development. By taking children out of their home environment for portions of the day it is likely that if school is a more positive, resource oriented, safe environment than home, children will develop more regularly. Additionally, preschool programs expose children to their like-age peers, allowing them to develop social skills that may not be fostered at home with parents or siblings. These early benefits continue throughout a child's life and can lead to decreased grade retention, decreased need for special education, and increased educational attainment, all of which have been significant in studies of previous preschool programs. Participation in preschool programs is also correlated with increased adult incomes, decreased arrests and convictions, and lower probability of adult welfare use. I will also address how family structure and the labor market are changing in favor of an additional year of public education.

The preschool movement has already begun, with significant politicians such as President Barack Obama and Bill de Blasio focusing their support and attention on the issue. Today's movement is no different than other education movements throughout history; people are fighting for equality, opportunity, and democracy.

Family Structure and Labor Market Trends

Over the past few decades the stereotypical image of the ideal American family, with a married mother and father with children where the father works and the woman runs the household, is becoming increasingly rare. Since 1970, marriage rates have declined rapidly. Looking at the share of women between the ages of 40 to 44 who are married there has been an 18 percentage point decrease from 1970 to 2006 (Cancian and Reed 2009). Similarly, the share of children living in homes with their two married parents has dropped to 69 percent in 2006 from 86 percent in 1970 (Cancian and Reed 2009). As a result, single-parent families are becoming more common in the United States, which is a cause for concern due to this groups' high poverty rate. Married couples with children in the U.S. in 2006 had a poverty rate of 7.5 percent and made up 46 percent of the population (Cancian and Reed 2009).

Compared to married families, single parent families make up a smaller share of the population with female-headed homes making up 9 percent of the population and male-headed homes comprising 4 percent. However poverty rates are significantly higher for these groups, 39.9 percent for a single mother with children and 19.0 percent for a single male with children (Cancian and Reed 2009). As family structures change it is probable that it is

increasingly difficult for parents, especially single-parents to juggle supervising their children, especially young children not enrolled in school, and their work, which I will show is increasing especially for women.

Women are working outside the home at increasing rates. According to a report released by the U.S. Bureau of labor statistics in February 2013, while only one-third of women were in the workforce at the end of World War II as of 2012 there was 57.7% women's labor force participation rate, slightly down from its peak of 60% in 1990 (BLS). These statistics account for both single-parent for families and married parent families who have decided either out of necessity or personal preference to have dual incomes. As women are working more, less women are staying in the home to care their children and are increasingly relying on outside resources as a part of their child's early life.

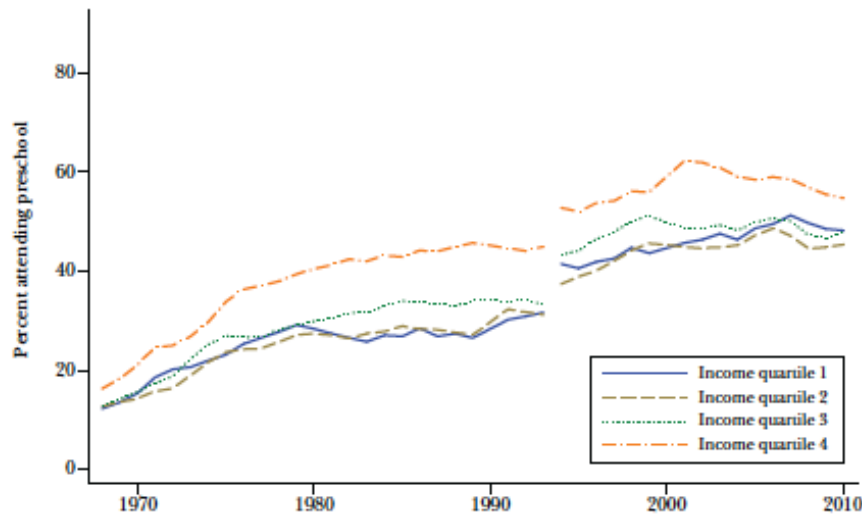
Trends in Preschool and Early Childcare Programs

Before addressing the impact on low-income individuals, it is important to look at the overall trends in the market for preschool and early child care programs. The Profile of Child Care Settings (PCS) Study, a study organized and funded by the U.S. Department of Education attempted to provide an accurate portrayal of available early childhood programs in the country in 1990. According to the PCE 80,000 center-based early education programs and 118,000 family day-care programs existed in the U.S. with the capacity for over 5 million and 860,000 children (Kisker et al. 1991). Other sources are more conservative but point to a similar picture. Fuller and Liang find in their 1996 study of the preschool supply market that over 80,000 organizations serving upwards of 4 million children across the country (Fuller and Liang 1996).

More recent data shows that the expansion in preschool during the 20th century has continued in the 21st century. According to the Institute of Education Sciences “from 1990 to 2012, the percentage of 3- to 5-year-olds enrolled in preprimary programs increased from 59 to 64 percent. The percentage of these children who attended full-day programs increased from 39 to 60 percent during this period” (National Center for Education Statistics 2014). Echoing these findings is Child Care Aware, an organization providing information nationally on child care programs. In a 2012 report their researchers state that 11 million children under age five participate in a child care or preschool program each week. Additionally, the study finds that approximately 117,000 center-based child care programs, 209,000 family-based child care programs, and 4,200 programs they categorize as “other” exist in the U.S. Head Start programs are included in this latter category (Child Care Aware 2012).

Two researchers, Greg J. Duncan and Katherine Magnuson, use data from the October Supplement to the Current Population Survey to compare preschool enrollment rates by income quartile in 2010. For reference, the median income in 2010 was about \$50,000 (U.S. Census). Figure 1 shows their findings (Duncan and Magnuson 2013).

Figure 1
Percent of Three- and Four-year-olds Enrolled in Preschool by Family Income Quartile



Source: Authors using data from the October Current Population Survey.
 Notes: Data represent three-year moving averages. Parents report on whether the child attends "regular school." The line break in 1994 corresponds to the addition of a question prompt, which defined regular school as including "nursery school, kindergarten or elementary school . . ." See Magnuson, Meyers, and Waldfogel (2007) for further discussion of how the Current Population Survey compares with other sources of data on preschool enrollment.

Not only does this figure provide a visual of the trend of increasing enrollment over the last 4 decades, but it also exposes an interesting phenomena. Beginning around the turn of the century, as funding for preschool and other childhood development programs for low-income families increased, the lowest income quartile began to have enrollments higher than income quartile 3. By 2010 the poorest 25% of Americans were sending their children to preschool at rates higher than those falling in the middle 50% (Duncan and Magnuson 2013). It seems that by subsidizing preschool programs for low-income families, the federal government is leaving behind a very valuable group in society: the middle class.

The expansion of the child development program and preschool industry may disguise low-income individuals lack of access to the market. It is possible that the expansion may have only occurred in high-class neighborhoods where parents have the disposable income to spend on childcare. Fuller and Liang find evidence of this theory in their regression study of

the preschool market stating, “sharp variability in household income...is clearly associated with preschool availability. Counties with higher median income and greater concentrations of well-educated, professionally employed parents display more robust preschool markets” (Fuller and Liang 1996). This phenomenon is of increasing concern if early childhood programs are to be an equalizing opportunity for poor children. Low-income families may have limited choices of programs, which may reduce competition and quality in the programs they can access.

The United States fares extremely poorly in an international comparison of childcare and preschool programs. When compared, using 2010 data, to the 34 countries in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United States fared below average in most all measurements. On average, 84% of students in preschool programs in OECD countries attended programs that were either run or supported financially by the federal government. In the U.S. only 55% of students attend public programs (OECD Education At a Glance: United States 2012). Additionally, the U.S. begins preschool programs, on average, at age 4, much later than most other OECD countries that begin at age 3 or below (OECD Education At a Glance: United States 2012). The U.S. ranks 28th when looking at percentage of 4 year olds enrolled in preschool (OECD Education At a Glance: United States). In 2010, 59.9% of U.S. 3- and 4-year olds attended any form of preschool, compared to an OECD average of 71.9% (OECD Education At a Glance 2012). From these statistics, it is obvious that not only is the United States falling behind other countries in federal preschool programs, but that the private market is not making up these gaps. Thus, the U.S. still ranks low when compared to other international countries.

Evidence for Preschool Programs

Privately funded preschool and early childcare programs for low-income children have showed significantly positive results. Many of these programs have been well-documented and analyzed in academic studies within various disciplines. These programs are often addressed in public discussions and are the backbone of arguments for those in favor of early childhood development programs. These programs vary in size, time period, and geographic location, though all are in the United States. I'll first examine the popular Perry Preschool Project, which ran from 1962 to 1967 Ypsilanti, Michigan, followed by The Abecedarian Early Childhood Intervention in North Carolina from 1972 to 1985. I will then address two federal programs, the Chicago Child-Parent Center Program, which has run in the city it is named after since 1967, and the federally funded Head Start program established by President Lyndon B. Johnson.

Experimental Projects

Two of the most popular early childhood development experimental programs are Perry Preschool and The Abecedarian Early Childhood Intervention (abc.fpg.unc.edu; Lynch 2004). The Perry Preschool project randomly assigned 123 impoverished, African American children to a control group and an intervention group entered into the study in five cohorts. The students in the intervention group had two years of preschool, beginning at age 3. Data was collected from individuals in both the control and intervention group once a year from ages 3 to 11, and then through various stages of their lives at ages 14,15,19,27, and 40 (Schweinhart 2013). Craig Ramey of the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill was the principal investigator of the original Abecedarian project, established to identify potential benefits of early childhood education (<http://abc.fpg.unc.edu>). The project selected 111 children of low-socioeconomic status who were enrolled in the program between 6 weeks and 12 weeks old and received intervention services until age 5. These services included full-day, 5 days-a-week, 50 weeks-a-year preschool as well as medical and nutritional support. Data was collected from participants and/or their families at ages 3, 5, 8, 12, 15, and 21 (Lynch 2004). While these programs were completely experimental, they are relatively small in scale leading some to argue that the results from these programs will not and cannot be the same for large-scale programs. As a result, I will also address two federal ECD programs.

Federal Programs

The two oldest federal programs for early childhood education are Head Start and the Chicago Child Parent Center. Initially only a summer program, Head Start became the program it is today through the Head Start Act of 1981 and was reauthorized in 2007 under President George W. Bush (www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ohs; Head Start Act). In 2014, 1,076,000 children across the country from low-income families were enrolled in the Head Start and Early Head Start program, which extends Head Start to infants through age three (www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ohs). Beginning in 1967, the Child Parent Center Education Program (CPC) has been providing early childhood education through the Chicago Public School System (Reynolds et al 2011). The CPC program attempted to provide both educational and family services to the participants, who were all of low socioeconomic status, from birth to age 6 (Reynolds 2003). The program continues today and serves about 5 thousand children annually through 24 centers across the city (Lynch 2004).

Benefits of These Programs

There are many ways to imagine how a quality preschool program would have benefits for the participants and their families, as well as society. For Jackson, he may not have had to repeat a grade if he had entered the education system on the same level as his peers.

Additionally, with Jackson in care for the majority of the day, his parents may have been able to increase their workload thus increasing the family's income. Anderson et al. (2003) published an article that provided a review of 16 different preschool studies from across the United States. Included in this paper was Figure 1, below, which presents potential mechanisms through which ECD programs could benefit children, their families, and society as a whole (Anderson et al. 2003).

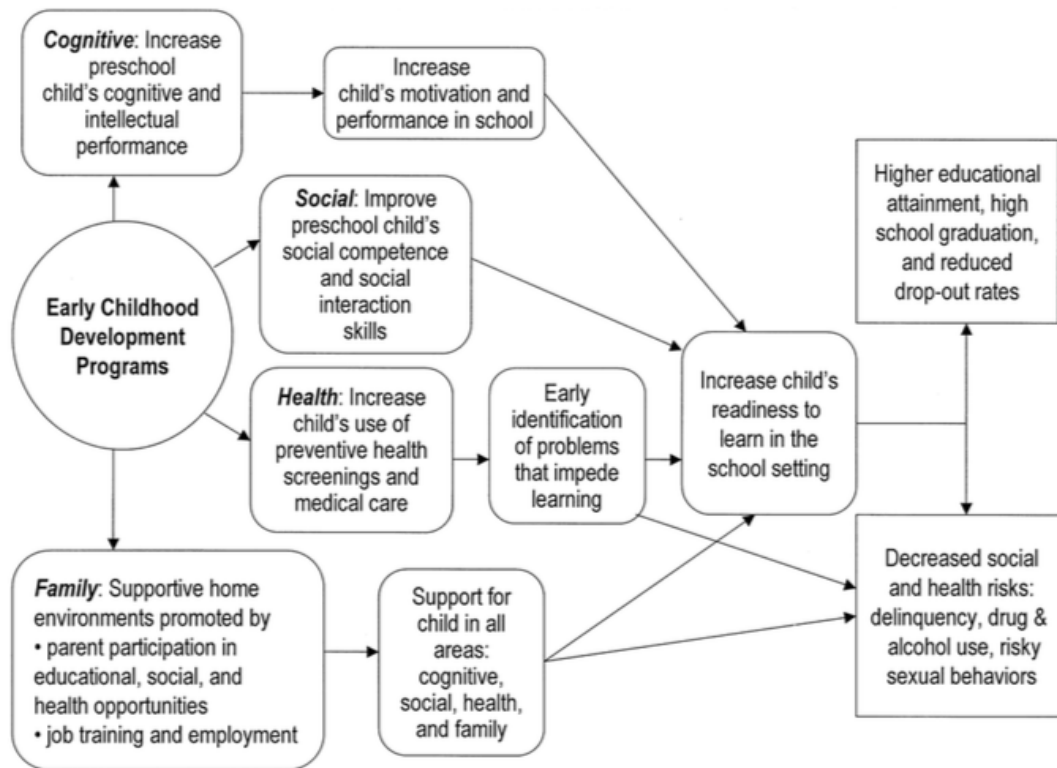


Figure 1. Analytic framework used to evaluate the effectiveness of programs for improving children's readiness to learn and preventing developmental delay.

In the following sections I will take time to address which benefits have been found through academic findings from these studies. I will first discuss their 4 major categories of possible benefits: Cognitive, which I will refer to as Education, Social, Health, and Family (Anderson et al. 2003). I will then also address benefits to society, including taxpayers.

Social Benefits

One of the most simple ways ECD programs could benefit children is by exposing them to their like-age peers in a positive, structured environment and thus improve their behavior and other social traits. In their summarizing article, Anderson et al. (2003) found that 5 studies examined social outcomes. 2 showed improvements in classroom behavior and intrinsic

motivation 1-year-post-intervention while one showed a negative impact. These authors note that the study with the strongest effect was that looking at the Perry Preschool program.

Looking at the Perry Preschool program specifically, more information can be uncovered about these social benefits. Research on Perry Preschool comes primarily from the HighScope Educational Research Foundation and the work of Lawrence Schweinhart, a researcher for the foundation since 1975 (nieer.org). Alongside his colleagues Schweinhart measured personal misconduct in terms of absences, inappropriate appearance, lying or cheating, stealing, speaking explicitly, and poor hygiene. They also combined 12 factors, most notable influencing others towards trouble making, attempting to manipulate adults, and being resistant to a teacher, to measure school misconduct. This information was gathered by teacher surveys from kindergarten to third grade. Overall, they found that Perry participants engaged in these activities significantly less than their control group peers (Schweinhart 2013).

Interestingly, the research for the Abecedarian Project and the CDC program did not focus on social behaviors and interactions, thus literature does not exist on the extent, if any of these effects.

The federal government released its own study of Head Start, entitled the Head Start Impact Study Final Report, in January of 2010. The experimental project identified 3- and 4-year-old Head Start applicants and randomly assigned them to be enrolled in Head Start or to be denied enrollment. However, these children were not barred beyond their own financial and personal constraints to access other ECD programs¹. Thus, in the end, about 60% of the control group had participated in an alternate ECD program. These groups were studied from age 3 or 4 to 3rd grade. This study used both parent and teacher reports to measure the social benefits of the program. The study found varied effects within the program based on age of entry. For the 4-year-old cohort the end of kindergarten reports yielded no increases in social or emotional factors. However, at the end of both first and third grade parents reported favorable effects while teachers reported unfavorable effects. Impacts on the 3-year-old cohort were different. From kindergarten to third grade, parents reported favorable effects, but teachers observed no difference. These in program results are as vast as we may expect to

¹ Additionally, it was found that local staff sometimes purposefully enrolled control group families into the Head Start Program. Additionally, in areas where more than one Head Start was operating, these families were not prevented from using those services if they were offered enrollment (Third Year Follow-Up 2012).

see across programs with very different structures. However, it is important to note that for parents there appear to be positive effects overall.

From a review of these studies, it is obvious that further research is needed to offer insight into how and if preschool programs positively effect participants through his or her schooling. The information discussed above from Perry Preschool and Head Start are optimistic that positive effects may exist, though they may not be for all parties involved.

Health Benefits

Many early childhood and preschool programs offer health services to children and health resources for their families. Due to the strict means of determining eligible studies for their review, Anderson et al (2003) found only one study that addressed health related concerns, which found that participants received screenings at much higher rates then the control group. The difference was a 44% increase in health screenings and 61% increase in dental examinations.

The studies of Perry Preschool do not study the health benefits on the program for participants compared to the control group.

A group of researchers lead by Peter Muenning used data from the Abecedarian Project to assess the effect of early education programs on young adult health outcomes at age 21. They found that the participants had significantly improved health as adults as measured by self reported health problems, number of hospitalizations in the past year, and a depression index score based on a 53-item questionnaire. Additionally, participants were significantly less likely to engage in risky behaviors that would negatively impact health. The authors used 11 different measures including, traffic safety (seat belt use, drunk driving etc.), drug use (number of binge drinking episodes per month and tobacco, cocaine, and marijuana use), and finally whether or not the individual had a primary care doctor at the time of the interview (Muenning et al. 2011).

For the 4-year-old cohort of the Head Start study, there were three different observed positive health effects. At age 4, the Head Start year, participants significantly more likely to receive dental care. In kindergarten and first grade they were significantly more likely to be covered by health insurance. Additionally in kindergarten, Head Start children were significantly more likely to have a health status that was indicated excellent or good (Third Grade Follow-Up 2012). Even more benefits were seen for the 3-year-old-cohort. At age 3, the Head Start year, participants were more likely to receive dental care and to list their health status as

excellent or good. The following year they were still more likely to receive dental care in addition to being more likely to have had care for an injury in the last month². By the time the children enter kindergarten, the previously observed effects fade away. However they are more likely to have health insurance coverage (Third Grade Follow-Up 2012). Again, this study is only through third grade, so it is hard to know the full effects of the program in terms of health.

Similarly to the social effects of preschool programs, health benefits appear to be widely under researched. It makes logical sense that these programs may positively affect health, as health well-being tends to be a goal of many of the programs. Additionally, these programs would have the ability to assist parents in monitoring the health of their child and help them access health resources when needed. The positive affects from the Abecedarian project and Head Start support this hypothesis.

Family Benefits

Very few programs have studied the effects of overall benefits to the family from early education programs. When they have addressed these potential benefits they are done so in very different ways. Anderson et al. (2003) notes that two studies narrowed in on family effects. One found positive effects in terms of parental employment and educational attainment as well as household poverty and welfare use. The other also found positive benefits, but they were measured by health outcomes of siblings of participants (Anderson et al. 2003).

Neither Perry Preschool, Abecedarian, the CPC program, or Head Start specifically focused on these family impacts. Even more than for social or health benefits, more research is needed into how preschool programs affect the family as a whole.

Educational Benefits

Many of the previous benefits lead to the hypothesis that preschool programs will positively benefit education. Additionally educational affects tend to be the most studied aspect of early education programs. Anderson et al. (2003) found that many reports of ECD programs looked at at least one factor of education to determine the potential benefits of the program. When using a standardized test score, 7 studies found increased academic achievement, 1 study reported a decrease in academic achievement, and 2 studies saw no change in academic achievement for attending an ECD program (Anderson et al. 2003). Additionally, positive

² This may be hard to interpret and the outcome is unclear.

effects were seen in 4 out of 5 studies that address student retention and in 5 out of 5 studies that researched the effects on the need for special education (Anderson et al. 2003).

In his 2013 follow-up of the Perry Preschool study, Schweinhart identified that Perry Preschool participants had significantly better outcomes in education than their control group peers. Specifically, participants outperformed the control group in school achievement measurements at ages 7, 8, 9, and 14 as well as graduating high school 17 percentage points higher than peers (Schweinhart 2013). Other studies of the Perry experiment have also found positive effects on education. For females, one study found increased higher levels of education, decreased use of special education, and higher grade-point-averages (Heckman et al 2010).

For the Abecedarian project, follow-ups found that at age 21, participants had significantly higher educational attainment than the control group, an effect that was stronger for women than for men. Additionally, preschool participants were significantly more likely to still be in school, 36% of the treated group was enrolled in a 4 year college or university compared to 14% of the control group (Campbell et al. 2002).

The Chicago Longitudinal Study followed 1,539 families who were overwhelmingly African-American and low income. From this data set, Arthur J. Reynolds and peers were able to separate families into a CPC intervention group, which included 989 families, that was compared to a control group of 550 families who met their criteria but had not participated in the CPC. They find that the preschool intervention group is significantly more likely at $p < 0.01$ to have higher educational attainment, to have completed high school, and to have graduated high school on time. However, there was no significant impact of the CPC program on obtaining a BA or AA degree (Reynolds et al. 2011).

The Head Start Impact Study finds initial impacts, especially in math scores, which appear to fade out by the 3rd grade (Third Grade Follow-Up 2012). The Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) added a question in 1995 asking whether or not the respondent (an adult over the age of 18) had participated in a Head Start program as a child. With this question having been added, Garces et al. determined the PSID's ability to demonstrate long-term effects of Head Start as the programs were actually implemented (Garces et al 2000). They identify about 4,000 adults who participated in Head Start as indicated on the PSID. After computing and accounting for differences in participants, the authors found encouraging effects of the Head Start program, separated by race. Long-term significant effects for whites

are seen by increased probability of high school completion (20.3% more likely than siblings who did not attend Head Start) and college attendance (28.1% more likely than siblings who did not attend Head Start and 20% more likely than those who attended other preschools) (Garces et al. 2000).

Overall, the effects of ECD programs on both academic achievement and educational achievement appear to be positive. However, the magnitudes of these effects are rather controversial and vary by program. It is probable that by increasing levels of educational achievement and attainment that individuals would be more beneficial members of society and thus have effects on society as a whole.

Societal Benefits

The strongest influence preschool programs have on society is through a reduction of crime. This decrease leads to less spending by the judicial branch of government, specifically due to the cost of incarceration and providing court-appointed lawyers. It is also possible that as a result of increased education attainment, the future income of those who were exposed to quality preschool may increase. As a result, there would potentially be a decrease in welfare spending when participant children are adults. Anderson et al. (2003) did not discuss the effects of either crime rates or welfare dependency in their analysis of the available literature. However, on my own I found significant evidence.

For participants in Perry Preschool, a reduction of crime was shown through many of the follow-ups (Schweinhart 2013). At age 40, the participant group had significantly less lifetime arrests in terms of violent, property, and drug crimes compared to the control group. This comparison holds true for both women and men (Schweinhart 2013). At age 27 the median income for participants was \$12,000³ compared to \$10,000 for the control group. Additionally, participants were employed at a rate of 69% compared to 56% (Schweinhart 2013). At age 40 these discrepancies increased; participants had a median income of \$20,800 and were employed at a rate of 76% compared to \$15,300 and 62% (Schweinhart 2013). As suspected due to these significantly increased incomes, the participant group showed a decrease in welfare dependency before age 27 compared to the control group (Heckman et al. 2010).

The Abecedarian report by Campbell et al. (2002), did not find a statistically significant difference between the participant group and the control group in relation to crime (Campbell

³ The authors fail to note whether these income values are in nominal or real terms.

et al. 2002). Additionally, their follow-up was completed at age 21 when many of the individuals were still enrolled in school. Thus, their finding that there were no significant differences in employment rates between the two groups is not surprising. However, those who went through the program were employed at rates 14 percentage points higher than their non-participating peers, a difference which may be telling despite its lack of statistical significance (Campbell et al. 2002). Additionally, participants who held a job were significantly more likely to hold a skilled job,⁴ which holds promise for the future.

Reynolds shows in his own work that the CPC program decreased rates of juvenile arrests (Reynolds 2003). Only 18% CPC intervention group had been arrested by age 18, compared to 27% of the control group (Reynolds 2003). In terms of income and SES, the intervention group was more likely to be in a higher SES bracket at the 5 percent level of significance and to have a higher average income (\$11,582 compared to \$10,796 annually in 2007 dollars) at the 1 percent level of significance (Reynolds et al. 2011). He does not address levels of welfare dependency, however as a result of the income and SES findings it is probable that welfare usage would decrease as well due to the inverse relationship between income and public assistance.

The federal government's study fails to address either of these concerns as participants have only been studied through third grade. However, the PSID data, as interpreted by Garces et al. (2000) provides insight into the relationship between Head Start and crime. They find that for blacks, those involved in Head Start were significantly less likely to have been arrested or convicted than their non-participating peers (11.6% less likely than siblings who did not attend Head Start) (Garces et al 2000). However, these findings do not appear to apply for all races.

Echoing earlier results, researchers debate over the extent of crime and welfare reduction as a result of preschool programs. However there is a general consensus that these two factors have positive benefits on society. Yet despite the educational, social, health, family and societal benefits outlined above, many Americans still do not agree with a universal preschool plan. I will now address three of the top concerns and explain that though universal preschool is not a panacea, it is currently the government's most effective and efficient way to combat poverty.

⁴ Skilled and non-skilled jobs were determined using the Hollingshed scale. A job that received a score of 4 or higher was considered "skilled"

Counter Argument #1: Lack of Short Term Benefits

Many individuals believe that there are benefits from preschool programs on the children who go through the programs and to society as a result of these individuals' actions. The full extent of these benefits will not be observed and understood for at least two decades, leading many adults to be skeptical of the programs because they themselves may not ever witness the benefits. Universal preschool may provide short-term benefits to the family and society however these are studied far less often.

First, universal preschool would provide free childcare to many working parents. As described above, there are more single-parent families and families with two working parents in recent history. Though it may be ideal, very few workers, including those earning top incomes, have the ability to entirely create their own schedule thus inevitably leaving amount of time in which their children must be in the care of someone else. Some families may turn to close family members or nannies, but increasingly as addressed above, families are seeking professional childhood development programs outside the home as a form of childcare. According to Child Care Aware, in 2012 annual program costs for a 4-year-old surpassed 10 percent of the median household income in 21 states and DC (Parents and the High Cost of Child Care 13). For one 4-year-old child, parents would, on average, spend the least in Mississippi at a rate of \$4,312 annually and 5th the most in New York at a rate of \$12,355 annually. In 19 states and in DC the average annual rate of care for a 4-year-old was high than the annual public college cost (Parents and the High Cost of Child Care 14). Additionally, even those children whose parents are eligible for Head Start are not able to participate in the program. A recent study shows that only 42% of eligible children actually attend Head Start programs and only 4 states filled their classes (Blair 2013). This data shows that there are many parents in the country in need of an affordable childcare program for their children.

By decreasing family expenditure on childcare or making this childcare available, families would have a higher disposable income to spend on other resources. Assuming the average individual will make rational decisions there are a variety of goods and services that the families may choose to invest their extra dollars in, which would have a benefit to the family and society. Imagine the family is now able to spend more on transportation so they can go to a grocery store with a variety of produce, which is brought home and cooked for the family. Now individuals in the family have better nutrition, better health, and less need for healthcare. This money could also be spent on improved housing in a better neighborhood, which could again improve health and reduce healthcare costs, but also has the potential to be located closer to the labor market increasing the likelihood of employment. I have only

narrowed in on a few specific mechanisms, but it is not difficult to imagine how increased income could positively impact a family.

A program providing free childcare could also influence parents' behavior. Due to the high cost of childcare, parents may have chosen not to work because the majority of their income would be offset by the cost of childcare for when they were working. These parents may already have plans to enter the workforce once their children enter public school, as many parents often do. By providing public schooling one year earlier, parents may potentially reenter the workforce earlier than expected. While this action will again increase the disposable income of the family and act similar to described above, going back to work earlier may also increase the future earnings of these individuals. One explanation for the gender gap in the labor force is that women are more likely to take career breaks than men and any time out of the workforce is detrimental to future employment and earnings (Bertrand et al. 2010). Thus allowing parents to reenter the workforce a year earlier and decrease the amount of time spent out of their career will not only increase the family's income in the first year but will have an effect on future incomes.

An increase in current disposable income as well as the potential for increased incomes in the near future for families are likely large benefits of a universal preschool program that will appear within little time of the program's implementation, showing that not all benefits will take 20 years to emerge.

Counter Argument #2: Preschool Programs Should Only be Expanded to Reach All Low-Income Families

It is key to note that the identified programs and many of my arguments tend to narrow in specifically on low-income children but my proposal is for universal preschool for *all* children. Many individuals would argue that funding for universal preschool is that too expansive and thus if as a society we are worried about the early childhood development of children, we should narrow our spending and focus only on the children of low-income families who are more likely to grow up in environments of risk. There are three reasons why I have chosen to expand these programs.

Remember Jackson, the boy who was living in a typical median income family household in 2010. Though his parents were making over 200% of the poverty threshold for their family type, they still did not have the resources to send him to a preschool program. While it may be assumed that it is only the lowest class in society that lacks access to early childhood programs, the middle class also struggles to bear the high cost of these programs. In fact, in

all 50 states, the average child care cost, which they note may be indistinguishable from preschool costs, was greater than the median rent (Early Childhood: American Progress). Some may argue then that we provide preschool for all of these children, making much more liberal eligibility rules. However, I argue for two reasons that this program would be less beneficial than a universal program.

First, a program for only poor children would segregate them from their better off peers, which may have negative effects. Increasingly the poor's lack of access to early childhood development programs is a sign of social exclusion, preventing them from the right of pursuing happiness. The social exclusion theory of poverty, as described by John Iceland, is the idea of considering a given individual in poverty if they are unable to participate in the normal functionings of society (Iceland 2003). One might think that providing preschool and early childcare programs for low-income families is enough to prevent them from being socially excluded in today's society. However, a purely low-income focused program segregates poor children from the rest of society as they are only able to interact within their own impoverished class. Thus, universal preschool is needed to foster relationships across class lines, only then will poor not be excluded from society in terms of early childhood programs. Most studies on the effects of mixed income interactions focus on the benefits of mixed neighborhoods, however one of these benefits is integrated public schools. Let's look at the Drew Charter School in Atlanta, which is part of a district that was almost entirely attended by children of one of the Atlanta projects nicknamed "Little Vietnam" in the 1960s (Garland 2012). Since then, the neighborhood includes many more middle class families as part of a program to revitalize the community. As a result, Drew is now the fourth best school in the city⁵ even though the school remains 93 percent African American. Though other changes have been made to the neighborhoods,⁶ including adding two preschool programs, the integration of mixed income students in the school has improved the learning environment (Garland 2012).

Additionally, in only addressing the children of low socioeconomic status we would fall victim to the "Poverty Prevention Paradox" coined by Jens Ludwig and Susan Mayer (2006). The paradox is that in focusing purely on children who come from poor families we are only addressing the "high risk" cases of those who will fall into poverty as adults. Individuals

⁵ Measured by test scores

⁶ The neighborhood added new grocery stores, golf courses, a YMCA, farmers' market, and a community garden

from middle income and high-income families will also find themselves in poverty as adults. Thus it is probable to see that an all-inclusive program may have positive effects not only for children growing up economically disadvantaged, but instead for all children who may become poor as adults.

Counter Argument #3: A Universal Program is Too Expensive

As mentioned before, a universal preschool program would require a significant investment, especially early in the program's development. To provide a high quality program to produce multi-facet benefits is expensive. However, reviews of these programs have found economic benefits for the participants, their families, and society as a whole, as discussed above. These benefits outweigh the cost of a universal program. A general cost-benefit ratio looks at the comparison of a program's anticipated overall costs and its predicted costs. Economists have calculated cost-benefit ratios for the Perry Preschool and Abecedarian programs.

Steven Barnett identified Perry Preschool to have a cost benefit ratio of 1:8.74 in 1993, or through the age 27 follow-up. Eight different categories were identified for which monetary values were able to be calculated or estimated for the costs and/or benefits. The categories are as follows "1) the preschool program's cost, 2) child care provided by the program, 3) elementary and secondary education, 4) adult education, 5) higher education, 6) employment, 7) crime and delinquency, and 8) public welfare" (Barnett 1993, 502). Although there are potential benefits that are not encompassed by these categories or are not easily put into monetary terms, such as benefits to siblings who did not participate or benefits from having higher educational attainment (increased health and better household management and parenting as an adult), these categories do investigate many facets of participants lives (Barnet 1985).

Cost benefit analysis for the program was estimated using "1) earnings and fringe benefits of participants, 2) earnings and fringe benefits of future generations, 3) maternal employment and earnings, 3⁷) elementary and secondary education cost-savings, 4) improved health, 5) higher education costs, and 6) welfare use" resulting in a ratio of 1:3.8 (Barnett and Masse 2002; Lynch 2004). It is important to note that because they did not find a significant difference in crime rates between the participants and the control group, they chose to not include the benefits and costs of crime in their analysis. However, there is potential that there could be a decrease in crime rates, though not significant, that would increase the benefits of

⁷ This appears to be a typo in the original paper and not an attempt to combine these two categories.

the program even greater than is expressed in this ratio. Regardless, the calculated ratio is still much higher than the 1:1 ratio that is widely accepted.

The methods discussed above yield results which show that the investments in early education programs are an extremely efficient way for the federal government to spend taxpayer dollars. Though there is a large cost to the program, evidence across a variety of factors shows that this cost is not reason enough to write off the program. From this evidence we find that a single dollar spent on early childhood programs can lead to a return anywhere from three dollars to eight dollars.

Conclusion

Universal Preschool is a program that could considerably aid our nation in its fight against poverty. Our society has a moral and political obligation to provide education that yields opportunity for all people. The current public school system fails to be an opportunity for many poor and minority children in this country. These children enter school performing worse than their better off peers and they are rarely able to overcome this gap. By studying past and current preschool programs, researchers have found positive social, health, family, educational, and societal benefits. These paybacks to the individual, family, and society can fulfill much of the achievement gap. There are concerns for implementing universal preschool; I have addressed each of these and shown, that while these are valid concerns, the benefits from the program outweigh these costs. I urge those with political power to fight for a universal program to give every single Jackson living in America right now an equal chance at living the American Dream.

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