

The Case Against Government Preschool – Myths vs. Facts

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INTRODUCTION: The pork-laden federal stimulus law contains \$53.6 billion for education including early childhood education and \$2.1 billion for Head Start and Early Head Start. Another \$2 billion was added to the Child Care and Development Block Grant, including \$93.7 million for childcare quality activities. Despite massive budget deficits, many states like Minnesota are still trying to spend more on these wasteful, ineffective, and invasive programs.

Although lacking evidence of effectiveness and political popularity, early childhood education has become the new silver bullet answer of the education cartel to solve America's education woes. Unfortunately, liberals and teachers unions with their desires for more funding and more control over families have been joined by big business, with its insatiable appetite for more workers, including mothers, and for government subsidies, in this case to cover employees' childcare costs. These businesses, along with allegedly conservative politicians and big government economists have gotten on the bandwagon of having childcare turned into another government education program funded by the taxpayers.

The following is part one of excerpts from a presentation given by this author at a "citizen jury" conducted at the University of Minnesota's Humphrey Institute for Public Affairs in the spring of 2008. Citizens were asked to decide about the benefits and necessity of expanding these programs in the state of Minnesota. Proponents of expanded government control over the minds and hearts of our youngest citizens had nearly three full days to present their case. This author, as the only opponent of this idea had 30 minutes. Despite the very lopsided ratio of presentation time, the assembled citizens were deadlocked in their decision – 1/3 supporting preschool, 1/3 opposing it, and 1/3 undecided.

This lack of enthusiasm for preschool is a microcosm of what is true for much larger populations. In 2006, for example, there was a statewide ballot initiative in California to tax the rich, those making more than \$400,000 per year individually or \$800,000 per couple, to fund universal preschool in that state. Despite it being in liberal California, in what was essentially a Democratic primary and an off-year election, after millions of dollars of campaigning by proponents, the measure failed by twenty percentage points.

This will be the first of several parts laying out the scientific, academic, economic, and developmental problems with government expansion of early childhood education and related programs. The entire presentation is available [here](#). We will first show the massive distortions of data used by economists, researchers, and governments to mislead people into thinking there is a crisis in preschool education:

MYTH: *Brain Research Shows that Children Won't Develop Normally Without Education from Birth*

"The brain development researchers will tell you that in the most stressful environments the damage to the brain is the most severe; waiting until the child turns three is too late." – Art Rolnick

<http://www.childrenofthecode.org/interviews/rolnick.htm>

FACT: There is NO Neuroscience Evidence Showing the Necessity of Early Childhood Education (ECE)

"Assertions that the die has been cast by the time the child enters school are not supported by neuroscience evidence and can create unwarranted pessimism about the potential efficacy of interventions that are initiated after the preschool years." - Jack Schonkoff and Deborah Phillips, ed., From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development, National Academy Press, 2000, p. 216 (Note: This study is frequently quoted by proponents of ECE, but it is very interesting that this quote never seems to make it into the discussion)

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“But there is already plenty of evidence that the biggest obstacle to learning is the belief that one cannot learn. By encouraging parents and teachers to accept this self-fulfilling prophecy, your story with its imagery of windows of opportunity slamming shut, may well do more to stunt children's futures than any deficiencies in their early upbringing. So far as we know, it is never too late for a child to get on the path to learning.” - Dr. Seymour Pappert, Lego Professor of Learning Research at MIT, and Dr. Daniel Dennett, Director of the Tufts University Center for Cognitive Studies (Newsweek, 3/11/96, p.15)

MYTH: *Large number of children in Minnesota and the US are inadequately prepared for kindergarten.*

“Minnesota has a readiness test right now and fifty percent of our kids do not pass that test. Most of those kids fall behind and never catch up. We've got pretty good data on that.” – Art Rolnick
<http://www.childrenofthecode.org/interviews/rolnick.htm>

FACT: **The studies are suspect and there is no “readiness” crisis in Minnesota or nationally.**

“We know that three, four, and five years olds are very poor test takers... you know they have their own agendas, their own personalities, their own timelines, and they don't have the personal skills to sit for testing sometimes. And sometimes they lack language skills to truly explain what they know. They also haven't learned the social skills or the social rules for test taking. So, with any assessment of young children, we have to recognize the limitations of the data we have... So, with work sampling or with other kinds of observational assessments, you might wonder about the quality of the observation that the teacher did. And we might wonder about the conclusions that the teacher inferred from the observations. Are they accurate? Is that child really demonstrating a proficient or is it really in process? We wonder about those kinds of things with performance based assessments. With other testing, we might wonder if the testing day was a good day or a bad day for the child. We might wonder, ‘Did he sleep well last night?’ Did he have breakfast this morning? All those things might have an impact on how the child might behave if it is a good day.” - Tracey Wallace, Kindergarten Readiness Assessment supervisor, House Early Childhood Learning Finance Committee, 2/2/07

“The Minnesota School Readiness Study found that between 90 percent and 97 percent of Minnesota five-year-olds were ‘In Process’ or ‘Proficient’ in five developmental areas necessary for success: physical development, the arts, personal and social development, language and literacy, and mathematical thinking.” – Minnesota Department of Education press release 4/2/08

National Study:

- 94% are proficient at recognizing numbers, shapes, and counting to ten
- 92% are eager to learn
- 97% are in good health
- 82% basic pre-literacy skills such as knowing that print is read from left to right.
(America's Kindergartners - NCES 2000-070, February, 2000)

FACT: **Readiness Assessments and Scores Can Have Negative Consequences**

“Because children develop and grow along a continuum with great variability, the goal of these studies is to assess children's proficiency within and across these developmental domains and not establish whether or not children are ready for school with the use of a composite ready or not ready score. Young children develop rapidly and at varying rates across the domains, and an early, definitive determination of readiness can have unintended negative consequences” – Minnesota Department of Education 2006 Readiness Study Report at
http://education.state.mn.us/mdeprod/idcplg?IdcService=GET_FILE&dDocName=031852&RevisionSelectionMethod=latest&Rendition=primary, pg 7