

How well is ‘Preschool for All’ working?

Preliminary reports indicate success for young children

Legislators, educators, children’s advocates and other members of the Illinois Early Learning Council are working toward creation of a formal, scientific evaluation of Preschool for All. They are preparing to award a contract for development of such an important assessment tool.

In the meantime, several other reports indicate that **Preschool for All supports high-quality early learning programs that help prepare young children for success in kindergarten and throughout their later school years.**

- The National Institute for Early Education Research gave Illinois’ preKindergarten program a grade of nine points (out of 10) on its “quality standards checklist” for 2006.
- The Illinois State Board of Education, which administers the state’s preK efforts, issued the most recent of its regular reports on the program in June 2007. This survey covered the 2005-2006 academic year for the state’s preK program for children at risk of school failure. (This is the longstanding program upon whose successes Preschool for All began to build even further in 2006-2007.) This report indicated Illinois’ preschool efforts helped to prepare young children for:
 - **Kindergarten readiness:** Teachers rated 69 percent of former preK participants (83 percent downstate, 45 percent Chicago) as “above average” or “average” in kindergarten-entry skills.
 - **Success throughout school:** Downstate teachers ranked about 82 percent of their former preK students as “above average” or “average” in reading, math and language in grades K-8.
 - **Standardized test achievement:** Generally, former preK participants at least kept pace with – and often outperformed – their classmates in marks on Illinois Standards Achievement Tests and Prairie State Achievement Exams, according to longitudinal surveys.
 - **High school graduation:** About 96 percent of former preK students downstate –and 78 percent of them in Chicago – went on to graduate from high school, longitudinal surveys show.

It’s particularly significant to reiterate that, prior to preK, screening indicated all these children were at-risk of academic failure.

ISBE urges that caution be used when interpreting data from its report on Illinois preK. The board acknowledges its study included several data gaps and no control group for scientific comparisons. This helps underscore the need we are currently working to fulfill: development of a professionally designed, scientific tool for evaluation of Preschool for All and more effective data systems that are coordinated with both K-12 and higher-education data efforts.

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