

BROOKINGS

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# Trouble in the Land of Early Childhood Education

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Policy Brief Accompanying the

Future of Children Volume:

“Starting Early:

Education from Prekindergarten to Third Grade”

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# Tennessee's Two Samples

- Full Sample:
  - 3,000 4-year-olds
  - Over-subscribed classes
  - No state data until end of 3rd grade
  - Publication of full-sample results are imminent
- Consented Subsample (56% of full sample):
  - About 2/3rds of 3,000 full sample had parental consent
  - Achievement tests, teacher interviews; end of preK, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade from tests and interviews conducted by researchers (not state data)

# Consented Subsample Results

- End of pre-K year:
  - Program kids performed better on achievement test
  - Higher ratings by teachers (prepared for school, work skills, positive about school)
- End of kindergarten: program children's advantage on achievement test disappeared
- End of 1<sup>st</sup> grade: Control group children rated by teachers as less prepared for school, weaker in work skills, more negative about school

## The provocative finding:

- Fade out is common
- But program group/control group reversal is not

## Explanations

- Flawed study design
- Contrast between pre-K and public school
- Work-oriented pre-K at age 4 is developmentally inappropriate

## Constructive Response

- Not acceptable to dismiss or ignore empirical findings
- Broader critique of pre-K literature:
  - » No common definition of pre-K
  - » Contrast with other early childhood programs, including early programs like Perry and Abecedarian, Head Start, day care
  - » Features of new pre-K movement: now in 43 states; mostly 4-year-olds; scaled-up; paid for by states; mainly associated with public schools
  - » Evidence on the new scaled-up pre-K may not be as strong as often asserted by researchers
- Creation of Pre-K Consensus Group