



Government-funded preschool left students worse off, new study finds

by [Jeremiah Poff](#), Education Reporter | January 25, 2022 12:33 PM

Students who attended state-funded preschools were more likely to have academic and behavioral struggles than their peers who did not attend those schools, a new study finds.

The study was [published](#) by the American Psychological Association in the academic journal *Developmental Psychology* and studied the academic and social outcomes of 2,990 students who attended state-funded preschools in Tennessee.



“Data through sixth grade from state education records showed that the children randomly assigned to attend pre-K had lower state achievement test scores in third through sixth grades than control children, with the strongest negative effects in sixth grade,” the study’s abstract says.

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“A negative effect was also found for disciplinary infractions, attendance, and receipt of special education services, with null effects on retention,” the study found.

Vanderbilt professor Dale Farran, one of the authors of the study, [told the Hechinger Report](#) that the results showed that, “at least for poor children, it turns out that something is not better than nothing.”

“The kinds of pre-K that our poor children are going into are not good for them long term,” Farran said.



"We're choosing to enact [pre-K] as a policy and if it's not working, we need to think about, well, what do we need to do for poor families to support them and their children so they do better in school?" she said.

Some of the children in the study control group who did not attend government-funded pre-K attended other preschool programs such as Head Start, a day care center, or "home-based care," *Hechinger* reported.

The new study comes as the Biden administration and congressional Democrats are seeking to find ways to revive aspects of the failed Build Back Better Act, which includes funding for universal pre-K education.

Max Eden, a research fellow in education policy at the conservative American Enterprise Institute, was quick to tout the study as further evidence universal pre-K and the Build Back Better Act would prove harmful for students.

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"This study provides further confirmation of what any honest reading of the literature suggests," he told the *Washington Examiner*, "which is that publicly provided pre-K, and pre-K and day care expansions of the sort that Biden proposed and might still push in Build Back Better will likely do profound harm to very young children."

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