

# Tennessee Voluntary Pre-K Study Policy Brief

Pre-k



In January 2022, researchers Dale Farran, Mark Lipsey, Kelley Durkin and Sarah Wiesen released the **latest findings** of a multi-year study following children who participated in Tennessee’s Voluntary Pre-K (VPK) program in 2009-10 and 2010-11 school years. In sum, the study finds that early gains faded and the VPK children were doing worse than their control group peers by the end of sixth grade.

While these results are disappointing and raise important questions about Tennessee public education, they **underscore what we know from decades of research on early learning – quality matters, not only for Pre-K programs, but also for the early learning continuum through third grade (and beyond).**

**Here’s what you need to know about Tennessee’s Voluntary Pre-K program in light of the study.**

- ▶ **Tennessee’s VPK program has been substantially improved since 2011, thanks to the Pre-K Quality Act of 2016.** Children who enter Tennessee Pre-K classrooms today have a very different experience from those in the study group who participated between 2009-11. Since that time, TN-VPK has been transformed in many ways – mostly as a direct result of the Tennessee General Assembly acknowledging improvements were needed and passing the Pre-K Quality Act in 2016.
- ▶ Thanks to **enhancements in curriculum, instruction, data and accountability**, Tennessee is now one of only 12 states that meet **9 out of 10 quality standard benchmarks** for effectiveness of preschool education programs according to the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER).
- ▶ **TN Pre-K works.** Previous studies by some of the same researchers tracking the same cohort of children show the benefits of the VPK program.
- ▶ A **2015 study** found that those who attended VPK were significantly better prepared for kindergarten than their non-VPK peers.
- ▶ A **2019 study** found that the children who went on to high-quality kindergarten through third grade classrooms with highly effective teachers maintained the academic edge over their peers. Again, proving that quality matters.
- ▶ **It’s what Tennesseans want. A recent voter poll conducted by Tennesseans for Quality Early Education** shows that Tennessee Democrats and Republicans are unified in their support of expanding early education as a fundamental strategy to improve student achievement. Eighty-nine percent said they believe TN-VPK should be available to all Tennessee 4-year-olds, and 87 percent support increased state funding to make that possible.
- ▶ **Beyond Tennessee, there is documented ROI.** There is a tremendous body of research documenting the benefits of high-quality preschool. Increased academic and career achievement as well as reduced costs in remedial education, health and criminal justice system expenditures led to Nobel Prize-winning economist James Heckman **documenting returns as high as \$7 – \$10 for every \$1 invested in high-quality Pre-K** for economically-disadvantaged children.

While there are still improvements to be made, Tennessee’s VPK program is a crucial tool for strengthening early learning. Pre-K cannot be expected to inoculate children against poor subsequent learning experiences. Quality early education – including high-performing elementary schools and highly effective teachers – must be sustained through third grade if we are to address the fact that statewide more than two-thirds of Tennessee’s third graders aren’t proficient in reading or in math. It’s proven that when children aren’t proficient by third grade, they tend to stay or fall further behind. **They’re four times more likely to drop out of high school and 60 percent less likely to pursue a post-secondary degree.** Enhancing the quality of early education is a fundamental strategy to reverse this unacceptable trend and give our students a better future.

[Download policy brief](#)



Posted: February 2, 2022

BY NICOLE SMITH [COMMENTS](#)

PREVIOUS POST

## More Related Posts

Issues

**Response to State of the State Address 2022**

Issues

**Virtual Town Hall Summary Report**

Issues

**New school funding formula framework released**

[View All](#)

## Add Comment

Write Comment...

Full Name

Email

Website

Save my name, email, and website in this browser for the next time I comment.

[Add Comment](#)

## Together, We Are Making A Difference

We’re proud to champion quality early childhood education for our great state of Tennessee, and with your help we’re accelerating progress.

**Effective Policy**

We develop sound, evidence-based policy that improves early learning.

**A Strong Voice**

We mobilize advocates and amplify their voices to fight for early education.

**Legislative Action**

We persuade state policymakers to adopt sound early education policy.

**A student not reading at grade level in third grade is 4 times more likely to drop out of high school.**



**Investments in high quality early education produce returns up to \$13 for every \$1 invested.**

### About us

We’re proud to champion quality early childhood education for our great state of Tennessee, and with your help we’re accelerating progress.

Call us **(615) 560-1324**

Address

We have offices in Nashville, Knoxville and Memphis. Mailed business correspondence should be sent to our support center at:

**22 North Front Street, Suite 760**  
Memphis, TN 38103

[Contact Us](#)

### Latest Articles

[Tennessee Voluntary Pre-K Study Policy Brief](#)  
FEBRUARY 2, 2022

[Response to State of the State Address 2022](#)  
JANUARY 31, 2022

[Virtual Town Hall Summary Report](#)  
JANUARY 13, 2022

### Policy Blueprint

- ▶ **An Urgent Need For Change**
- ▶ **Engaged & Empowered Parents**
- ▶ **Quality, Affordable Child Care**
- ▶ **Excellent Early Grades Teaching**
- ▶ **Strong Accountability**

### Child Care Study

**Child Care Study**  
Download Now

Follow us:



Search...

### Categories

- ▶ **Bright Start**
- ▶ **Covid-19**
- ▶ **Issues**
  - ▶ Child Care
  - ▶ Early Home Visiting
  - ▶ Pre-k
  - ▶ Teaching
- ▶ **Mayors Coalition**
- ▶ **News & Reports**
- ▶ **On the Hill**
- ▶ **Parent Resources**
- ▶ **Stories**

**Join 28,047 TQEE Coalition Members**

First Name  Last Name

Street Address

Your Email  Your Zip Co.

[Join TQEE](#)

### Policy Blueprint

- ▶ **An Urgent Need for change**
- ▶ **Engaged & Empowered Parents**
- ▶ **Quality & Affordable Child Care**
- ▶ **Excellent Early Grades Teaching**
- ▶ **Strong Accountability**

**Support TQEE – Like Our Site!**

[Like](#) [Share](#)