

# The Patriot Post® · Vandy Study Pours Cold Water on Universal Pre-K

By **Emmy Griffin** · February 2, 2022

<https://patriotpost.us/articles/85957-vandy-study-pours-cold-water-on-universal-pre-k-2022-02-02>

Vanderbilt University's Peabody Research Institute has published a [study](#)<sup>1</sup> that it has been conducting since 2005 on the short- and long-term effects of preschool in underprivileged kids. Of the 2,990 children the institute followed (some went to public pre-K, others did not), there was no marked difference in performance.

This should be no great surprise.

A similar study was conducted on the 1965 Head Start program — the brainchild of President Lyndon B. Johnson and his “war on poverty” — that found no discernible difference in academic performance at the elementary school level. Both the Vanderbilt and Head Start studies point to the fact that access to public preschool doesn't actually benefit them in the long run. In the Head Start [study](#)<sup>2</sup>, the overall findings were that “the advantages children gained during their Head Start and age 4 years yielded only a few statistically significant differences in outcomes at the end of 1st grade for the sample as a whole. Impacts at the end of kindergarten were scattered.”

The timing of the Vanderbilt study, which had similar findings, could not be more poignant in light of the struggles that the Democrats, spurred by President Joe Biden, are having figuring out a way to make [Bilk Back Better](#)<sup>3</sup> more palatable. One

element, universal pre-K, seemed to be popular across the board, as it provided much-needed “free” childcare for working families struggling to pay for other alternatives. It might be better for moms and dads, but it is not better for their three- and four-year-olds, and it would be a [colossal waste of taxpayer dollars](#)<sup>4</sup>.

One [theory](#)<sup>5</sup>, explains the Wall Street Journal editorial board, is that “these programs expose children to more rigid academic settings before it is developmentally appropriate.” Children this age learn through play, and being subjected to an easier form of kindergarten is not something that helps them in the long run. When children play, they are developing a lot of those “soft social skills.” These skills include: memory, organization, self-control, cause and effect, focus, and planning. These skills are harder to learn in a society where digital distractions and screen time foster instant gratification, which is the enemy of the toil it takes to develop executive functions.

The next explanation for the Vanderbilt study's findings would be (of course) poor teacher training. I say “of course” because blaming the teacher is always the next logical step. But in this case, teachers of this age group often do not have the proper training or respect that comes with their grade level. One reason for this might be that

teachers and administrators have a hierarchy of importance and a stigma attached to teachers of pre-K and elementary school. Teachers who educate children under the age of 10 are seen as less important and not as intelligent as the middle and high school teachers and are often left to their own devices. This is particularly true in the private school sector.

A Fortune [article](#)<sup>6</sup> quotes Dale Farran, the director of the Peabody Research Institute. It states: “Farran said that pre-k classrooms in Tennessee lack a ‘coherent vision’ and leave teachers to ‘their own devices’ to figure out how to guide their students.” I have found this true in my own experience of teaching in the Volunteer State. As a new teacher, I too was left to create first-grade curriculum with not much to guide me.

The last hypothesis for the ineffectiveness of universal pre-K is that children this young need their parents. Mothers and fathers are a child’s first and most important teacher. A parent is often going to be more invested in their children’s well-being and education than any teacher they will have. Even a well-meaning, loving teacher usually only has the child in their care for a year. Parents are the constant. Maybe the real problem isn’t working moms needing “free” childcare, but a society that devalues [parenthood in general](#)<sup>7</sup> and motherhood in particular and placing the burden of duty on work instead of with the building of [healthy functional families](#)<sup>8</sup>.

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**Correction:** There was *no* marked difference in performance, not a marked difference.

## Links

1. <https://doi.apa.org/doiLanding?doi=10.1037%2Fdev0001301>
2. [https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/hs\\_impact\\_study\\_final.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/hs_impact_study_final.pdf)
3. <https://patriotpost.us/articles/85715-biden-bids-to-bilk-back-bit-by-bit-2022-01-21>
4. <https://patriotpost.us/opinion/85799-universal-pre-k-another-progressive-bad-idea-2022-01-26>
5. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-evidence-on-free-pre-k-vanderbilt-study-build-back-better-11643656440>
6. <https://fortune.com/2022/01/29/democrats-universal-prek-new-tennessee-study-negative-effects/>
7. <https://patriotpost.us/articles/85405-pope-francis-value-children-over-pets-2022-01-10>
8. <https://patriotpost.us/articles/83598-courage-in-the-face-of-our-birth-rate-decline-2021-10-21>

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