

EDUCATION JUSTICE

PROGRAMS THAT WORK

Educational “**Programs that Work**” are those with an established track record of improving learning for students. Typically, these programs not only advance individual student achievement but also strengthen schools and families. By developing more well-educated and productive citizens, these programs also reduce the high costs of high school dropouts and invigorate our democracy. Therefore, over time, they help build stronger communities.

While views vary about which programs are best, many researchers and educators agree that proven **Programs that Work** include:

- High quality pre-K
- Teaching and school leadership
- Small class sizes in the early grades
- Certain middle and high school programs, and
- Afterschool and summer school

Ongoing research will continue to reveal the most effective and efficient programs at all grade levels. At the same time, state departments of education and school districts can play a critical role by evaluating programs intended to improve opportunities and learning so those that succeed can be replicated and those that do not can be discontinued. Their evaluations could help districts decide how to invest in **Programs That Work** best.

High Quality Preschool

The benefits of high quality preschool are extraordinary, both for the children who attend and in the economic return to society on its investment. Children who attend high quality programs do better in school and have fewer referrals to special education, greater high school graduation and college-going rates, and lower teen parenting rates. Preschool also boosts family involvement in schools, and launches children on a trajectory of success that lasts a lifetime. Former participants are more likely to be employed and own a home, and commit fewer crimes. Pre-K even generates high economic return for taxpayers, at least \$5 for each \$1 invested.¹

Oklahoma and New Jersey lead the nation in providing high quality pre-K. Oklahoma offers all four-year-old children the opportunity to attend free of charge and serves about 70%

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of them, ranking first among the states on access to publicly funded preschool. New Jersey's [Abbott pre-K program](#) serves over 40,000 three- and four-year olds in its lowest wealth, predominantly minority, school districts. Without this program, most of these children would start school behind and face great difficulties in trying to catch up.

Both states also offer two of the highest quality programs in the country, and their pre-K students are realizing big gains in school readiness.² Features that make pre-K programs high quality include certified teachers, small class sizes, and early learning standards.³

Teaching and School Leadership

Teaching quality is crucial to learning. The most important school resource in fostering children's educational progress is the quality of classroom instruction. Principals and other school and district leaders are equally important because strong principals serve as "instructional leaders," helping teachers develop into the best guides to academic success that they can be for their students.⁴

Schools and districts with concentrated poverty are especially in need of strong teachers and principals. Typically, America's least trained and most inexperienced teachers and principals come and go through these schools, trying to cope with inadequate facilities, overcrowded classes, and extraordinary needs precipitated by concentrated poverty. Reaching the higher achievement goals set for these schools and districts will only be possible with fairer distribution of high quality and experienced teachers and school leaders.⁵

The "highly skilled educator program" in Kentucky offers helpful lessons. Schools not reaching state achievement goals underwent detailed reviews to identify weaknesses and then received ongoing problem-solving assistance from highly skilled educators, who mentored teachers and/or school leaders for up to two years. Unlike takeovers and other disruptive, often unsuccessful interventions, this program has an impressive record of turning schools around and helping them reach their achievement targets.⁶

Smaller Is Better, Class Size in Grades K-3

Confirming what parents and teachers already knew, research on class size finds that smaller is better. Classes of fewer than 20 students in kindergarten through third-grade have a significant positive effect on achievement. Far more students, especially low-income students, graduate from high school if they attended small classes when they were in grades K-3.⁷

Class size initiatives for early grades, like Tennessee's Project STAR and Wisconsin's SAGE program produce lasting achievement gains, not only during their early years but

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continuing into high school and beyond. This growth – both higher achievement and higher graduation rates – is most significant when children have access to smaller classes for three or four years, rather than only one or two years.⁸

Middle and High School Programs

In addition to the major gains produced by preschool, quality teaching and leadership, and small classes in the early grades, some middle school and high school programs are making critical differences for children. While a number of programs show promise, such as small high schools and freshman academies, research on secondary programs has been limited. Two specific high school programs, First Things First and Career Academies, do have a good research base and are making important contributions to better outcomes.

Both of these programs boost high school graduation rates and share important features. First Things First emphasizes small schools, long-term teacher student relationships, and mentoring. In Career Academies, which are especially successful with “at-risk” youth, students are instructed with career-related materials and gain experience with local employers. Both programs offer small class or school settings with more individual attention to students. These characteristics – small and personalized – keep students engaged so that many stay in school and succeed. As with other **Programs that Work**, upfront costs generate long-term savings.⁹

Educators and researchers will continue to review the implementation of these two programs, and ongoing studies of the affects of other secondary programs bear watching.¹⁰

Afterschool and Summer Programs

While strong academic programs and curriculum during the school day are key, students and their families also benefit from quality afterschool programs and summer school. Participation in afterschool programs produces achievement gains, but is even better known for improving work habits, social skills, and overall behavior. Moreover, afterschool programs increase family and community involvement, which in turn strengthens schools and student learning.¹¹ Nationally, about 8 million students attend afterschool programs and about 15 million more need these programs

Many children are responsible for taking care of themselves after school. They and their communities would be well served by successful afterschool programs. Especially when local organizations participate, children can gain exposure to community-based service learning, new career options, the arts, and more.

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By their very nature and time of day, afterschool programs also facilitate interactions with parents. When parents feel comfortable and connected with an afterschool program, they tend to build better connections with teachers and staff from the regular school day, too. The educational benefits of greater parental involvement are well-documented and include better attendance, higher graduation rates, and more positive attitudes.¹²

Summer experiences also affect school success. Most children anticipate summer joyfully, and many learn and grow through family trips, camp, and other engaging activities. However, children who do not have access to these kinds of enriching experiences suffer significant learning losses during the summer. Summer programs keep children safe, teach new skills, and let them explore their interests while maintaining reading and math gains from the school year. They also give working parents peace of mind.¹³

In sum, these **Programs that Work** are proven and effective. Experience shows that they provide learning opportunities, get parents more involved, and boost achievement when implemented well. Although funding the upfront costs of these programs can be challenging, the benefits to children, families, and society as a whole are enormous. In the long-term, these programs generate large cost savings and major returns in the form of economic prosperity and more civic participation.¹⁴

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See resources in footnotes.

¹ See, e.g., William T. Gormley Jr., Ted Gayer, Deborah Phillips, and Brittany Dawson, *The Effects of Universal Pre-K on Cognitive Development*, 41 DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY 872, 872-884 (2005); William T. Gormley Jr., Deborah Phillips, Ted Gayer, *The Early Years: Preschool Programs Can Boost School Readiness*, Science, 320 EDUCATION FORUM 1723, 1723-24, 27 (June 2008) available at [www.newamerica.net/blog/files/gormley-06-27-08%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.newamerica.net/blog/files/gormley-06-27-08%20(2).pdf).

² Id.

³ See Pre-K and “The State of Preschool 2008,” National Institute for Early Education Research, Rutgers University.

⁴ See, e.g., Linda Darling-Hammond, *Teacher Quality and Student Achievement: A Review of State Policy Evidence*, EDUCATIONAL POLICY ANALYSIS ARCHIVES 8, no. 1 (2000); KENNETH LEITHWOOD, ET AL., HOW LEADERSHIP INFLUENCES STUDENT LEARNING, LEARNING FROM LEADERSHIP PROJECT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY, (2004).

⁵ Andrew Calkins, et al., *The Turnaround Challenge: Why America’s Best Opportunity to Dramatically Improve Student Achievement Lies in our Worst-Performing Schools*, MASS INSIGHT: EDUCATION & RESEARCH INSTITUTE (2007); Linda Darling-Hammond, *Teacher Quality and Student Achievement: A Review of State Policy Evidence*, EDUCATIONAL POLICY ANALYSIS ARCHIVES 8, no. 1 (2000).

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⁶ Jane L. David, Pamela Coe, Patricia J. Kannapel, *Improving Low-Performing Schools: A Study of Kentucky's Highly Skilled Educators Program* (PARTNERSHIP FOR KENTUCKY SCHOOLS 2003) ("Highly Skilled Educators"); Susan Perkins Weston and Robert F. Sexton, *Substantial and Yet Not Sufficient, Kentucky's Effort to Build Proficiency for Each and Every Child*, Paper at the Columbia University Teachers College Symposium on "Equal Educational Opportunity: What Now?", (Nov. 12-13, 2007); Molly A. Hunter, *All Eyes Forward: Public Engagement and Education Reform in Kentucky*, 28 J. L. & EDUC. 485 (October 1999). In April 2008, the Kentucky legislature cut education funding for the upcoming biennium, choosing cuts to public schools over a higher cigarette tax. Beshear might veto items in budget, call session on taxes, LEXINGTON HERALD-LEADER, Apr. 4, 2008 at A1.

⁷ Jeremy D. Finn, Susan B. Gerber, and Jayne Boyd-Zaharias, *Small Classes in the Early Grades, Academic Achievement, and Graduating From High School*, 97 J. EDUC. PSYCHOLOGY 2, 214-23 (2005). This article contains valuable resources and studies.

⁸ *Id.*; [Glass, Achilles, etc., most recent report from Tennessee STAR Study, date].

⁹ The Return on Investment for Improving California's High School Graduation Rate, Clive R. Belfield and Henry M. Levin (2007)

¹⁰ *Economic and Social Consequences of Inadequate Education*, in HENRY M. LEVIN CLIVE BELFIELD, THE PRICE WE PAY, 177-99 (Brookings Institution Press 2007); JAMES J. KEMPLE WITH CYNTHIA J. WILLNER, CAREER ACADEMIES: LONG-TERM IMPACTS ON LABOR MARKET OUTCOMES, EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT, AND TRANSITIONS TO ADULTHOOD (June 2008); KNOWLEDGEWORKS FOUNDATION, DOLLARS & SENSE, THE COST EFFECTIVENESS OF SMALL SCHOOLS (2002).

¹¹ Anne T. Henderson and Karen L. Mapp, SOUTHWEST EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT LABORATORY, A NEW WAVE OF EVIDENCE: THE IMPACT OF SCHOOL, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS ON STUDENTS ACHIEVEMENT, (2002).

¹² Henderson, A. T. , Berla, N (1994) A New Generation of Evidence: The Family is Critical to Student Achievement. ERIC ED375968.

¹³ Afterschool Alliance, Summer: A Season When Learning is Essential, June 2008, *available at* www.afterschoolalliance.org/ www.afterschoolalliance.org/issue_briefs/issue_summer_33.pdf.

¹⁴ The Return on Investment for Improving California's High School Graduation Rate, Clive R. Belfield and Henry M. Levin (2007) (the researchers' findings apply nationally, not just in California).