

Response to VT LEG #364815 v.3  
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### **Summary**

**Senate Bill 56B** is not an appropriate nor evidence-based response to the need for early pre-kindergarten programs for the children of Vermont. The absence of ecological influences of child development in the Bill's language is concerning. By disregarding neuroscience, adverse childhood experience, and early developmental learning theories and reducing prekindergarten to curriculum alone (even NAEYC), this legislation shows a serious lack of understanding of child development and early learning theories, evidence, practice. This is most concerning for Vermont's most vulnerable children.

The following definition of PreKindergarten describes a model that is insufficient for children and families experiencing poverty and adverse experiences:

“Prekindergarten education” means services designed for prekindergarten children that are play-based, developmentally appropriate, and foster early development and learning experiences based on Vermont’s early learning standards.” (VT LEG #364815 v.3)

### **Prekindergarten as Defined in VT LEG #364815 v.3 Cannot Provide the same Educational Benefit to VT Children in Poverty as Head Start - the Focus of Prekindergarten is only on the developmental/ educational dimensions of early learning.**

Long standing neuroscience, child development, and social economic research explains the complex and dynamic reasons the Head Start model is needed for our most vulnerable children to succeed in school and adulthood. Offering education-even high quality models- will not be effective alone.

### **Developmentally appropriate learning experiences alone will not have the same compensatory effect as Head Start for poor children.**

The proposed prekindergarten would be a reduction in evidence-based, compensatory services for children experiencing poverty. Head Start includes high-quality early childhood education based on developmentally appropriate/ researched based curricula; educational efforts for parents, enhancing nutrition at home, and developmental screenings. Head Start “wraps around” the family and offers developmental screenings, support for medical, dental, and mental health services. Head Start offers parenting and advocacy training and support (Zigler, Gilliam, and Barnett 2011).

“The effects of Head Start on adult outcomes could result from its early education components. But the program’s health and nutrition services were likely important as well. Head Start’s vaccinations and screening (e.g., tuberculosis, diabetes, vision, hearing) and referrals to local physicians may have prevented complications from

childhood diseases (Ludwig and Miller 2007, North 1979) and helped parents obtain simple, cost-effective technologies to improve learning (e.g., eyeglasses and hearing aids or antibiotics to reduce hearing damage from ear infections). Healthy meals and snacks may have also raised children's ability to learn. Early estimates suggest that more than 40 percent of children entering Head Start were receiving less than two-thirds of the recommended allotment of iron, and 10 percent were extremely deprived in terms of their daily calories (Fosburg et al. 1984). Among children who received blood tests in the 1968 full-year program, 15 percent were found to be anemic (DHEW 1970)."

**Head Start is Responsive to the Community Needs, conducting a community assessment every five years and updated annually. This allows Head Start to offer wrap-around parent/ child/ community services that further bolster the effects of early childhood education. These might include: addressing substance abuse disorder, homelessness, need for food/ nutrition.**

The proposed pre-kindergarten model does not account for the ecological factors associated with child development, school readiness, and life long effects of adverse childhood experiences, it will disadvantage poor children.

### **Poor Children Will Lose Critical Supports Under a Universal Prekindergarten Model in Vermont**

Head Start is uniquely different from early childhood education, even from the highest quality early childhood education models. Head Start focuses on school readiness and facilitates better learning in the K-12 system (ref). The relationship between the Head Start wrap-around services and adult outcomes for children growing up in poverty cannot be equaled in the proposed prekindergarten model.

This is tantamount to a loss of evidence-based support to the most vulnerable families. For children attending prekindergarten, the loss of services that would have been provided by Head Start (i.e., health, wrap around, extended day, individualized family support) may be a significant and measurable *disadvantage* to children and have life long impacts.

### **Head Start is Proven to Have Life-Long Positive Impacts on Poor Children's Adult Outcomes**

There is long standing, strong, and robust evidence that Head Start programs increase educational attainment and earnings in adulthood; and also reduce the likelihood of poverty and incarceration for poor children. A recent study reported on the complimentary and dynamic relationship between Head Start spending and K-12 spending.

### **This Bill does not provide evidence that it will equal or improve the complex and dynamic relationship between Head Start and K-12 Program Outcomes.**

This language of this bill presumes that all early education is equal in it's impact on child development, school readiness, and efficacy of K-12 education. Head Start is just that, a *Head Start*, addressing the formula of ecological support needed for a child to enter and succeed in public education. This is a 50 year old formula and along with decades of practice, the economic, sociological, and educational benefits are long-standing. Head Start Performance

Standards offer a continuous quality relationship between programming and child outcomes that are monitored and supported with technical assistance. The fidelity of high quality early education is a challenge for models without this system (Johnson, & Jackson, 2019).

**Research shows Head Start has better longer-term economic returns and life-long outcomes for children than universal, large-scale preK programs because of important mechanisms associated with Head Start (and similar compensatory programs)**

Over the past 20 years, substantial evidence has accumulated that model preschool programs have sizable economic returns (Almond and Currie 2011, Cunha and Heckman 2007, Duncan and Magnuson 2013, Heckman et al. 2010). However, convincing evidence on the long-run returns to larger scale, public preschool has remained sparse (Phillips et al. 2017)

Head Start vs. larger-scale public preschool programs  
HS Children 2.7 percent more likely to complete high school  
HS children 8.5 percent more likely to enroll in college  
HS children college completion rose by 12 percentage points  
HS children incidence of adult poverty reduced by 23 percent  
HS children public assistance receipt reduced by 27 percent

Heterogeneity Tests Suggest the benefits are associated with health screenings, referrals and nutritious meals combined with curriculum for disadvantaged children. Complementary effects with growth in family and community resources were also cited as associated benefits. (Bailey, Shuqiao, and Brenden, 2021).

**Reference:**

Bailey, Martha J., Shuqiao Sun, and Brenden Timpe. 2021. "Prep School for Poor Kids: The Long-Run Impacts of Head Start on Human Capital and Economic Self-Sufficiency." *American Economic Review*, 111 (12): 3963-4001.

Johnson, R. C., & Jackson, C. K. (2019). Reducing inequality through dynamic complementarity: Evidence from Head Start and public school spending. *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, 11(4), 310-349.

Zigler, Edward, Walter S. Gilliam, and W. Steven Barnett, eds. 2011. *Current Debates and Issues in Prekindergarten Education*. Baltimore: Brookes Publishing.

