



Concerns with and Alternative Recommendations for the Proposed Expansion of Florida's Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten Program and Identification Number in HB 757/SB 468 & HB 79/SB 656 - Summary

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Executive Summary:

This paper submits that the vast majority of research on early childhood programs shows the proposed expenditure of \$10 million taxpayer dollars to expand reading curriculum in Florida's Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten program is unlikely to be successful and may actually harm reading achievement and the emotional development and natural curiosity of attendees. Play-based, developmentally appropriate preschool programs with expansion of intensive systematic phonics in grades K-3 are recommended as far more likely to be successful. Other successful strategies include genuine, non-government controlled parental involvement, and incentivizing two-parent family formation through welfare and divorce law reform. Data and psychological privacy concerns related to adding an identification number in VPK are also discussed.

What does work to close the achievement gap:

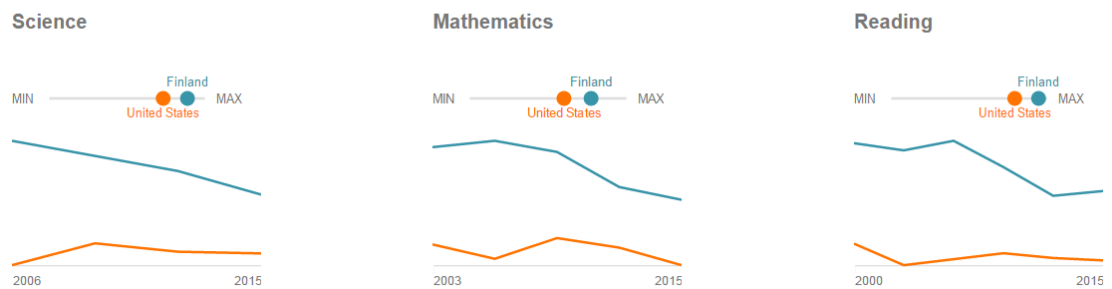
- Two parents and religious involvement, which could be achieved by incentivizing instead of penalizing paternal involvement during the transition off of welfare:
 - [The Effects of Black and Hispanic 12th Graders Living in Intact Families and Being Religious on Their Academic Achievement.](#)
 - [A Meta-Analysis: The Relationship between Father Involvement and Student Academic Achievement](#)
 - [Religiosity, Religious Schools, and Their Relationship with the Achievement Gap: A Research Synthesis and Meta-Analysis](#)
- Parental involvement
 - [A Meta-Analysis: The Relationship Between Parental Involvement and Latino Student Outcomes](#)
Jeynes, William H.
 - [A Meta-Analysis of the Relation of Parental Involvement to Urban Elementary School Student Academic Achievement](#)
- Phonics (Three examples of literally thousands) - There does not need to be more research. Intensive systematic phonics needs to be explicitly mandated for any elementary reading program, not just in preschool.
 - [A Meta-Analysis of the Relationship between Phonics Instruction and Minority Elementary School Student Academic Achievement](#)
 - [Causal Relationships between Phonics, Reading Comprehension, and Vocabulary Achievement in the Second Grade“](#)
 - [The Importance of Phonics: Securing Confident Reading \(From the UK with further details HERE\)](#)
- Play – If Pre-K is successful at all, it is more likely so when developmentally appropriate and play-based, not academic
 - [Preschool Linked to Success on Global Math Test - But caution is urged on interpreting data](#)

"The Finnish example [of high PISA scores and high preschool enrollment in Finland] has been used to say, OK, there's an argument to be made to do early literacy and math in preschool," said Marianne Bloch, an education professor emerita at the University of Wisconsin-Madison who studies early-childhood education around the world, ***"but then the Finnish people say, we don't encourage our kids to start [primary] school until age 7, and they think play is learning. So it's difficult to do these comparisons in a reliable and meaningful way."***

[PISA – Finland outperforms the US](#)

Average performance

The headline indicator for the three subject areas: science, mathematics and reading. Average performance refers to all 15-year-old students in a country/economy regardless of the school type and grade attended. Small differences between countries and over time may be statistically insignificant.



Both of the following studies discussing the need for play-based preschool were [summarized as follows](#):

[The double-edged sword of pedagogy: Instruction limits spontaneous exploration and discovery](#)

[Children's imitation of causal action sequences is influenced by statistical and pedagogical evidence](#)

These assumptions lead children to narrow in, and to consider just the specific information a teacher provides. Without a teacher present, children look for a much wider range of information and consider a greater range of options.

Knowing this, it's more important than ever to give children's remarkable, spontaneous learning abilities free rein. That means a rich, stable, and safe world, with affectionate and supportive grown-ups, and lots of opportunities for exploration and play. Not school for babies.

[THE ROLE OF PROGRAM QUALITY IN DETERMINING HEAD START'S IMPACT ON CHILD DEVELOPMENT](#)

"The one exception is that for 3-year-old program entrants **low exposure quality, defined as less exposure to academic activities during Head Start participation, produces better behavioral impacts in the short-run than more exposure to academic activities. Even so, there is no indication that either high quality Head Start or low quality Head Start in any dimension leads to program impacts lasting into third grade.**"

Evidence that Pre-K Does Not Help or Harms Academic Achievement Showing No Justification on Spending More Money on VPK

- General

[Compilation & Analysis of Early Childhood Research Regarding Effect, Fade Out, Academic & Emotional Harm](#) - More than two dozen different studies and articles showing the major problems with preschool

There is also much excellent similar analysis from [Joy Pullmann](#), a Heartland Institute education research fellow; [Jane Robbins](#) of the American Principles Project; [David Armor](#) from the Cato Institute; and [Lindsey Burke and Salim Furth](#) at the Heritage Foundation.

[Sending Government Agents Into People's Homes Won't Fix Preschool's Failures:](#)

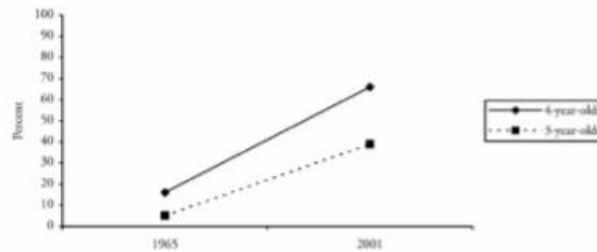
Dale Farran is one of the co-authors of the 2015 [Vanderbilt University study](#) showing not only government preschool's oft-seen fadeout of benefits to children and society but also the increasingly frequent academic and emotional harm of these programs. She recently admitted in a [Brookings Institution white paper](#) that *despite 50 years of research, the early childhood research base is too small to support: 1) "the proposition that expanding pre-K will improve later achievement for children from low-income families;" 2) "the presumption that solid research exists to guide the content and structure of pre-K programs;" or 3) evidence "about which skills and dispositions are most important to effect in pre-K and what instructional practices would affect them."*

Farran also rightly discusses the sad truth that preschool quality measures have "no empirical validity." She goes on to say, *"Despite being included in national and state policies and used to hold pre-K providers accountable, none of the widely used measures of classroom and center quality relates strongly, if at all, to child growth on the school readiness outcomes on which most pre-K programs are focused."*

- [National and state data showing that pre-K does not improve reading achievement:](#)

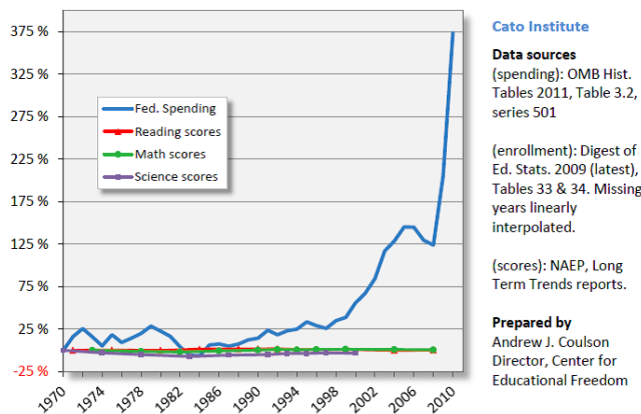
National - No change in NAEP reading scores despite a great increase in preschool participation:

Figure 1: Percentage of Three- and Four-year-olds Enrolled in Preprimary Programs, 1965-2001



Source: National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics*, 2003, Table 43, available at nces.ed.gov/ipeds/data/digest/d03/tables/dt043.asp.

Figure 2. Inflation-Adjusted Federal K-12 Spending Per Pupil and Achievement of 17-Year-Olds, % Change since 1970



Oklahoma

Oklahoma is the state with the highest percentage of children in the nation enrolled in their pre-K program and the highest quality rating scores according to the National Institute for Early Education Research ([NIEER](#) – see page 4 of PDF). The program started in 1980 and went universal in 1988. Oklahoma went from having [NAEP 4th grade reading scores](#) above the national average in 1992 to being below the national average every time the test was taken since then. The [2010 graphs](#) from the NAEP organization showed that 72 percent of Oklahoma fourth graders are reading below their grade level proficiency.

Georgia

Their preschool program began in 1993 and went universal in 1995. Its overall ranking for quality and access is 3rd in the nation according to [NIEER](#) (page 4 of PDF) with 58% of their children participating in the government program. Before, during and since this massive and expensive 15 year preschool expansion, [Georgia's 4th grade reading NAEP scores](#) have remained below the national average. [State data](#) (p. 70 of pdf) through the first grade showed that children involved in a private program or those who were raised at home did the best academically.

- [Evidence shows that Pre-K does not help improve and even harms reading achievement, especially for poor children](#) –

From [National Head Start](#) - *The program had few to no positive effects for 4 year old children granted access to Head Start after the first grade year.*

[Tennessee \(2015\)](#) - *“In second grade, however, the groups began to diverge with the TN-VPK children scoring lower than the control children on most of the measures. The differences were significant on both achievement composite measures [reading and math] and on the math subtests”*

Oklahoma - In this high quality, high access, universal preschool state, *a 2010 national study reported by the [Tulsa World](#) found that “more than four out of five children from low-income families fail to reach the proficiency level in the 4th grade reading, according to the National Assessment of Education Progress.”*

New Jersey - That state has been offering court ordered preschool to low income children since 1998. *Yet, the number of poor children scoring below basic on the [4th grade reading NAEP test](#), meaning that they were illiterate, increased from 1992-2007.*

- **Evidence that academic preschool harms children’s natural curiosity and readiness to learn:**

There are eight more studies showing the emotional harm of pre-K, including behavior problems, [in the list of studies](#) cited above under the “Emotional Harm” section. Here are a few examples:

[Tennessee \(2015\)](#) – *“First grade teachers rated the TN- VPK children as less well prepared for school, having poorer work skills in the classrooms, and feeling more negative about school.”*

[University of California at Berkley and Stanford University \(2005\)](#) – *“Attendance in preschool centers, even for short periods of time each week, hinders the rate at which young children develop social skills and display the motivation to engage classroom tasks, as reported by their kindergarten teachers...”*

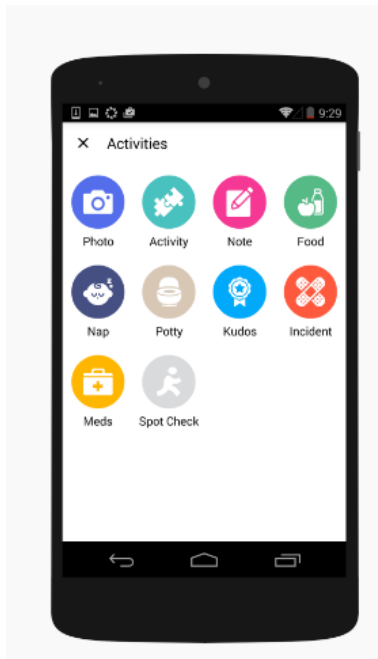
- **Child development experts around the world object to assessing preschool students**

Resistance to assessing young children on pre-reading, math, and social emotional parameters for the International Early Learning Study (IELS) was [reported](#) by “more than 130 child-development researchers and educators in 20 countries...[that] signed a statement in the December International Critical Childhood Policies journal [urging caution on the IELS](#)” due to concerns about developmental inappropriateness of these assessments.

Data Privacy Concerns from Adding an ID Number for VPK

Even though the new proposed VPK ID number is theoretically for only a year or two, the dangers to privacy, freedom of conscience and parental autonomy are severe. Pre-K is the only level in school where it is considered proper to teach and assess vague, invasive, controversial social emotional learning (SEL) parameters on children and families. There are efforts on many levels, both public and private, [to expand government mining of SEL](#) and [sensitive family data](#).

Here is a screenshot of a [new pre-K online assessment](#) tool:



Sadly, groups in this state misguided the population into believing that it is the role of government to determine, inculcate and monitor the *"...emotional, social, regulatory and moral capacities through education in basic skills and such other skills as the Legislature may determine to be appropriate"* [Florida Constitution, Article IX, Sec. 1(b)]. [According to the glossary for the pre-K standards, molding attitudes and perceptions are clearly seen as the government's purview because they are not shy about defining "affective" as follows:](#)

Related to factors such as emotional regulation, child motivation, attitudes, perceptions, and values.

VPK and school readiness are not academic issues, they are workforce, and "children as widgets" in the labor supply chain issues as these *pre-K programs are run by the Agency for Workforce Innovation, not the Department of Education*.

Even if assessments are initially limited to academic subjects like reading, how does one avoid expansion of, indoctrination, and data mining of controversial issues when they are part of the Florida Constitution, are required by the federally mandated P-20W (Pre-K, or Prenatal in some states, through age 20 Workforce) state longitudinal data systems, and when there are such concerning examples from Florida's Pre-K standards?:

"Make sure your three year-old has access to books and other materials that show diversity in family composition and in careers." (p. 107 PDF the [Florida Early Learning Standards](#) document found on the FLDOE page and family is defined in those standards as "A group of individuals living together" (p.127)

They also start discussing career issues with children as young as three: "Shows awareness of some social roles and jobs that people do" (p. 107).

Regardless of one's views, these attributes and aspirations should be discussed and molded by families and religious institutions and not by any agency of the government. This kind of egregious violation of inherent parental autonomy has been struck down again and again by US Supreme Court. (Pierce vs. Society of Sisters, Meyers vs. Nebraska, Wisconsin vs. Yoder, etc. [all reviewed HERE](#)).