

Child-Parent Centers

A Summary of:

“The Child-Parent Center Program and Study” (2000) Success in Early Intervention: The Chicago Child-Parent Centers pp. 22-63. University of Nebraska Press. By Arthur J. Reynolds.

“Long-term Effects of An Early Childhood Intervention on Educational Achievement and Juvenile Arrest” (May 2001) Journal of the American Medical Association 285(18): 2339-2346. By Arthur J. Reynolds, Judy A. Temple, Dylan L. Robertson, and Emily A. Mann.

Focus

- ✓ Early Childhood
- ✓ Primary School
- Middle School
- Secondary School
- Postsecondary
- Extended Learning

Overview

Established in 1967 through funding from Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965), the Child-Parent Center (CPC) program provides comprehensive educational and family support services to economically disadvantaged children from pre-school through early elementary school. The program serves children in high poverty neighborhoods where there is no ready access to Head Start facilities. Before enrolling their children in CPC, parents must agree to work with the program for a half a day per week. CPC provides half-day pre-school to children (for ages 3-4), half- or full-day kindergarten (for ages 4-6) and supplementary services to primary school children (ages 6-9) and their families.

POPULATION

Since 1967 CPC has served about 100,000 Chicago families. Currently, the program operates in 23 centers throughout the Chicago Public School system. The longitudinal study compared 989 children, who attended 20 CPC sites in Chicago’s highest poverty neighborhoods during the mid-1980s, to a non-randomized, matched comparison group of 550 children, who participated in alternative early childhood programs and then full-day government-funded kindergarten. The vast majority of students in both groups were African American (93%), from low-income families (84%) or living in single-parent households (70%). The expected high school graduation year for youth in the study was 1998-99 and 84% of the original participants were still involved in the study in 2000.

Key Findings

Relative to children in the matched comparison group, the participants in the CPC program had the following academic achievement gains:

- ◆ Higher rates of high school completion (49.7% vs. 38.5%; significant at the .01 level).
- ◆ More years of completed education (10.6 vs. 10.2; significant at the .03 level).
- ◆ Lower school dropout rates (46.7% vs. 55%; significant at the .047 level).

- ◆ Lower cases of juvenile arrests (16.9% vs. 25.1%; significant at the .003 level).
- ◆ Lower rates of violent arrests (9.0% vs. 15.3%; significant at the .002 level).
- ◆ Were less often classified as needing Special Education (13.5% vs. 20.7%; .004 significance level).

The longer children and their families participated in CPC programs, the stronger the effects on academic achievement. Relative to children with less extensive participation in the program, children who participated from pre-school through second or third grade:

- ◆ Experienced lower rates of grade retention in grades K-12 (21.9% vs. 32.3%; .001 significance level).

In terms of gender, the CPC program had the strongest effect on boys. The group of predominantly African American males from CPC experiencing a 47% higher rate of high school completion than the males in the comparison group.

CPC program attendance rates regularly exceed 92%, which is four to six percentage points higher than other Title-I programs.

Program Components

CPC is founded on the assumption that school success is facilitated by a stable and enriched learning environment during the entire period of early childhood (ages 3-9). The following components are shared by the majority of CPC program sites:

- ◆ CPC pre-school and kindergarten programs are affiliated with elementary schools, but they are located in a separate building or wing of the school. The staff include a head teacher, parent-resource teacher, classroom teachers, teacher aides and school-community representatives. These programs serve from 130 to 210 students, and they have 6 classrooms on average. CPC primary school programs are all located in elementary schools and they serve from 90 to 420 students in 4-18 classes.
- ◆ Half-day CPC pre-school programs are offered for 3 hours in the morning and 3 hours in the afternoon. CPC kindergarten programs are either half day (2.5 hours) or full day (6 hours). Both programs run throughout the regular nine-month school year and for 8 weeks each summer.
- ◆ The child to teacher ratio in CPC pre-school programs is 17:2, while the ratio in kindergarten and primary school programs is 25:2. The presence of parent volunteers further reduces the child to adult ratio in CPC classrooms.
- ◆ Parents get involved in numerous ways with CPC programs, from volunteering in the classroom to joining reading groups in the parent-resource room. CPC staff conduct home visits and parents are encouraged to read with their children, attend parent-teacher conferences, enroll in parent education classes and attend social events organized by CPC staff. Parent involvement is required during pre-school and kindergarten, and encouraged during the primary grades.
- ◆ The CPC curriculum emphasizes basic skills in language arts and math through a variety of learning experiences including whole class exercises, small groups, individualized learning activities, and field trips. In conjunction with these academic enrichment activities CPC fosters the psychosocial development of children.
- ◆ Health screening, referrals, speech therapy and nursing services, as well as free breakfast and lunch are available to CPC students and families.

- ♦ The average annual cost of the half-day pre-school program in CPC was \$4350 per child. The average annual cost of the primary school CPC program (grades K-3) was \$1500 per student above the cost of normal school programming. Both figures given in 1996 dollars.

Contributing Factors

Early Intervention

Program evaluators believed that early intervention had the greatest impact because it focused on the early childhood years “when children and parents are most receptive to change.”

Parent Involvement

Before children are accepted for the program, parents must commit to participating at least a half day per week. The evaluators observed that “many parents do not often participate to this extent,” but they ranked various parent involvement activities. The highest parent participation occurred in parent-resource rooms, organized school activities and home support activities. Evaluators ranked parent participation in classroom volunteering as “moderate,” and parent enrollment in formal adult education courses was ranked “low.” Parent-center resource rooms located in every CPC site serve as the focal point for parent services and involvement.

Community Involvement

Each CPC program site has a full-time community liaison, who has usually grown up in the neighborhood around the school. This staff member identifies families in need of CPC services and goes door-to-door to recruit prospective families. The community representative also conducts at least one home visit per enrolled child.

Program Continuity/Long-term support

Evaluators argued that one of the key factors that contributed to program success was the duration and continuity of support received by CPC children from age 3 to 9, especially in contrast to the relatively haphazard academic support available to other children from similar socio-economic backgrounds. This continuity facilitated student transitions from pre-K to kindergarten and from kindergarten to the elementary school grades.

Individualized Attention/Small Classes

“The relatively small class sizes and the presence of several adults enable a relatively intensive, child-centered approach to early childhood development,” according to the evaluator.

STUDY METHODOLOGY

This quasi-experimental, longitudinal study originally included all children who enrolled in the 20 CPCs with pre-school and kindergarten programs beginning in the fall of 1983 and who were kindergarten graduates. Children who were age 3 or 4 when they enrolled could participate in the program up to age 9 in the spring of 1989. The comparison group included children who did not have a systemic intervention from pre-school through third grade, though some had participated in Head Start and most had attended an all-day kindergarten called the Chicago Effective Schools Project (CESP). These two groups were matched for race/ethnicity, gender and family income. The parents of CPC program participants had a higher high school graduation rate than the parents of children in the comparison group (66% vs. 60%), but evaluators took these differences into account when measuring program effects. By the age of 20, 83% of the original sample of 1,539 children were still involved in the longitudinal study.

EVALUATION & PROGRAM FUNDING

Title I of the Improving America's Schools Act funds the pre-school and kindergarten components of the CPC program, while the State of Illinois funds the primary school component of CPC. The evaluation was funded by the National Institutes of Health and the U.S. Department of Education.

GEOGRAPHIC AREAS

Chicago, Illinois

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