



CASE EXAMPLE:

Building school readiness skills through increased time in one-on-one relationships with trained, caring adults

PROBLEM: Disadvantaged students enter kindergarten with significantly fewer cognitive and social skills than their more affluent peers. Compared to children without family risk factors (e.g., living below the poverty level, primary home language is not English, single-parent household, mother did not complete high school), children with two or more family risk factors at the start of kindergarten are:

- Almost three times as likely to score in the bottom quartile in reading (47% vs. 16%)
- More than 1.5 times less likely to be able to identify letters of the alphabet (44% vs. 75%)
- About a third as likely to be able to associate letters with sounds at the end of words (6% vs. 22%)
- More than 1.5 times less likely to be able to count beyond 10 (38% vs. 68%)
- Twice as likely to be described by teachers as often in fights with classmates (14% vs. 7%)
- Almost twice as likely to be described by teachers as “never” or only “sometimes” eager to learn (36% vs. 20%)
- More likely to be described by teachers as “sometimes” or “never” paying attention well (44% vs. 28%)⁴⁵

Without these academic skills, and with these counter-productive behaviors and attitudes, students are less likely to acquire the literacy tools they need to read fluently, build vocabularies, and explore new domains of knowledge (e.g., topics like trains and dinosaurs) that will help them understand and learn from what they read.⁴⁶

SOLUTION: Building school readiness skills, such as language, literacy, and emotional and social skills, through increased time in one-on-one relationships with caring adults

SUCCESSFUL MODEL: This program model sets up one-to-one relationships over the course of a school year between motivated caring adults – largely college students but also working and older adults – and low-income three- and four-year-olds who attend a community-based preschool (including Head Start). The program partners with colleges and

universities to recruit and train a team of undergraduates – its “corps members.” After 30 hours of training, each “corps member” is paired with one preschooler who is selected based on need (as identified by the program’s diagnostic tool). The corps member then works with the preschooler for about 240 hours across one school year to build the early literacy and behavior skills he or she will need to succeed in kindergarten. Activities include larger group work to build language and social skills and dialogic reading to promote literacy and vocabulary development. (“Dialogic reading” is a technique that actively involves the child in reading, where the adult listens, questions, and prompts the child into becoming the story teller.⁴⁷) The program also provides activities for parents to share with children at home that reinforce the learning that occurs in school.

EXEMPLAR AGENT: **Jumpstart** piloted this program model in 1993 at Yale University by serving 15 preschoolers. Since then, it has grown rapidly to serve approximately 13,000 preschoolers in 70 communities in 20 states.

ACCOUNTABILITY PRACTICES: **Jumpstart** evaluates both its outcomes and quality of implementation on an annual basis. It has begun planning for a multi-year study focused on its work in Boston that will track students from kindergarten through third grade to see whether its impact is lasting and meaningful. **Jumpstart** also has an Assessment Advisory Committee that is responsible for maintaining high evaluation standards for the program. This committee consists of **Jumpstart** staff plus experts in a range of fields, including early childhood education, early language and literacy development, preschool assessment, and program evaluation.

WHAT’S THE IMPACT? In an internal evaluation of its implementation nationwide in 2006/2007, **Jumpstart** found that 60% of the students enrolled in the program outperformed their matched comparison group of preschoolers from the same classrooms on a school readiness measure – a statistically significant improvement.^{48, 49} This result means that **Jumpstart** children are more likely to enter kindergarten on track to succeed. Based on research findings regarding quality preschool programs, we can expect these children to perform better in kindergarten than their non-participating peers.⁵⁰

Jumpstart is currently conducting a longitudinal study to understand how the program's gains affect student achievement past kindergarten. Until the results of that study are available, we can consider the results of other long-term studies on the sustainability of quality preschool effects. While the long-term effects of early education programs depend in part on the quality of the students' subsequent instruction, research suggests that students who participated in preschool – especially in high-quality programs – perform better than peers during elementary school. For example, a recent study considered the effect of preschool on more than 2,500 British children who had attended on average for 18 months.⁵¹ Based on the study's results, its lead investigator concluded that at age 10, the children who went to a high-quality preschool performed 27% higher on a standardized math test than their peers who did not attend preschool.⁵²

HOW MUCH DOES CHANGE COST? Between \$1,600 (at lowest cost sites) and \$3,100 (at highest cost sites) per additional student making greater gains on **Jumpstart's** "school success" composite measure, indicative of students' development of early literacy and language skills, and their social and emotional development. Some factors that influence whether a site is high or low cost include location, the existing level of resources in the preschools, resources that partners can provide, as well as local and state support for early childhood education.

SECONDARY IMPACTS OF THE PROGRAM:

- Decreases pupils-per-instructor ratio in preschool classrooms so that students in the class get more one-to-one attention from instructors
- Improves teaching quality in preschool classrooms by sharing evidence-based strategies with teachers and providing occasional training
- Provides corps members with extensive experience and opportunities to learn about childhood development, motivating them to become educators and leaders in early education
- Supplements existing classroom resources with books, supplies, and volunteers for special projects (e.g., classroom painting and repairs)
- Keeps parents up-to-date on child's progress in language, literacy, social, and behavioral skills development
- Raises public support for early education through national and local campaigns (costs not included in the cost-per-impact figure)
- Works with education policymakers to promote improvements in access to and quality of preschool (costs not included in the cost-per-impact figure)

CASE SNAPSHOT

Core practice – Supports one-on-one relationships between trained, caring adults and students

Impact sought – Increased school readiness, including early literacy and social skills

Success rate – Of 100 preschoolers participating, the practice would enable an additional 60 students to increase their school readiness scores

Cost per beneficiary – Average annual cost per student (as reported by the nonprofit) ranges between \$981 and \$1,873

Estimated cost per impact – Roughly between \$1,600 and \$3,100 per additional student with increased school readiness

For more information, see **Jumpstart's** website: <http://www.jstart.org> or contact Joe Wiinikka-Lydon, Associate Director of Development, at (617) 542-5867.