Focus: Culture of Poverty Myths

Tying the Knot Between School Finance Policy and Serving All Students

by David G. Hinojosa, J.D.

For several decades, debates have dominated statehouses across the country on whether money makes a difference in education. This debate often surfaces whenever a question arises about whether the state is fulfilling its obligation to equitably and sufficiently fund a quality education of all students in all school districts.

Yet, despite rhetoric from a few holdouts surmising that money does not make a difference in education, most readily acknowledge that money can make a difference (Hanushek, 2015). Indeed, strong, recent research shows that increased funding by the states has contributed to both improved student performance and lifetime outcomes, especially for underserved students (Jackson, 2016; Lafortune, 2016).

Figuring out the true costs of educating all students is not an exact science. However, there is a cost for virtually every education service and for ensuring a well-educated workforce to serve students. Education cost studies – when done right – can provide policymakers estimates of funding actual student need. This is a first critical step in enabling policymakers to bridge educational funding policy with effective research and practice.

Education cost studies take several forms. They range in rigor and quality with each having its strengths and weakness. Some are more quantitative focused, such as cost function analyses, and others are more qualitative focused, such as professional judgment panels. More than 50 cost studies have been conducted across the states. The table on the following page identifies the four most frequent types of cost studies.

Potential Shortcomings in Cost Studies for Underserved Students

For decades, experts have conducted valid cost studies that serve as potential resources for policymakers. In 1976, IDRA engaged in a Texas-based cost study using an expert panel methodology to identify critical elements of an effective bilingual education program. These included costs unique to the implementation of the specialized program: student assessment, program evaluation, supplemental materials, staffing, staff development and parent involvement (Robledo, 2008). The cost levels varied slightly depending on the grade levels involved and the number of years a program had been in existence, with newer programs reflecting slightly higher costs for start-up. The results led to a recommended funding weight between 0.25 and 0.42, meaning districts would receive between 25 percent and 42 percent more funds above the basic allotment (Robledo Montecel & Cortez, 2008). Later replications of the 1976 IDRA study included analyses of costs in Colorado and Utah, which determined that costs include additional resources needed to recruit and retain bilingual teachers (Robledo Montecel & Cortez, 2008).

Around the same time, the Texas Governor’s Office of Educational Research and Planning conducted an audit of exemplary school districts, (cont. on Page 2)

“We can pursue shared prosperity by keeping our eyes on the goal of quality education for every child in every school, understanding that education matters, community voices matter in education, and much is known about what to do.”

– Dr. María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel, IDRA President and CEO
Determines how much a district would need to spend to reach a certain performance target, in light of particular student characteristics.

Evidence-Based: Relies on a combination of effective schools research in tandem with expert panels to define and cost out “effective” educational practices.

State Examples:
- Arizona, California, Georgia, Kansas, Missouri, New York, Texas

In a cost-function analysis, experts may lower spending schools that are familiar with critical, research-based services. In an evidence-based study, experts may not distinguish between language needs for EL students and low-income students (Krueger, 2003). If a school district with high concentrations of low-income students has a well-financed budget, it can hire more teachers and reduce class sizes. Similarly, fair funding can help a school district recruit, hire and retain high-quality teachers, especially for high-minority schools; offer full-day pre-kindergarten centers (Schweinhart, 2005).

**Major Types of Education Cost Studies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cost-function</td>
<td>Determines how much a district would need to spend to reach a certain performance target, in light of particular student characteristics.</td>
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<td>Evidence-Based</td>
<td>Relies on a combination of effective schools research in tandem with expert panels to define and cost out “effective” educational practices.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expert/Professional Judgement</td>
<td>Gathers input from groups of experienced education professionals (teachers, administrators, special program designers, etc.) and/or experts on the essential components necessary for a particular type of program, followed by collection of data on the actual dollar costs of those services. Often reviewed by panel of external experts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successful Districts</td>
<td>Based on data on existing school operations, followed by development of costs actually experienced in those settings.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**State Examples**
- Arizona, Arkansas, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, New Jersey, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, Vermont, Washington, Wisconsin, Wyoming, Texas
- Colorado, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, South Carolina, Washington, Virginia
- Ohio, Mississippi, Illinois, Maryland, Kansas, Louisiana, Colorado, Missouri, New Hampshire, New York

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The National Institute for Early Education Research endorses preschool programs that have been shown to benefit economically disadvantaged children and resulted in these long-term outcomes. Moreover, it has been found that students from all socio-economic backgrounds benefit from early childhood education (Barnett, 2008). Research also has attributed commitment to schooling, higher adult employment rates and earnings, and reduced adult crime and incarceration to participation in early learning programs (Schweinhart, 2005).

**Benefits of Early Childhood Education Programs**

Researchers find preschool attendance is associated with increases in cognitive outcomes, such as school progress, high school graduation rates and post-secondary enrollment. They also show decreases in grade repetition and dropout rates (Barnett, 2008; Bakken, et al., 2007).

Gains in standardized test scores are a significant outcome in many research studies on early education. A growing number of studies associate high-quality early childhood program participation with improved scores on tests taken at older grade levels (Bivens, et al., 2006). Early childhood programs also are credited with improving children’s social development, and reducing disruptive behaviors and the number of juvenile arrests (Bakken, et al., 2007; Bivens, et al., 2006).

**Investing in Early Childhood Education Programs Yields High Returns**

by Paula Johnson, M.A.

Numerous studies have confirmed the positive effects of preschool programs on future student achievement (NEA, 2002). Data from the latest census, however, reveals that only 64.2 percent of all 3, 4- and 5-year-old children are being enrolled in preschool programs (NCES, 2006).

Studies have found many long-term benefits of free preschool education across three broad categories: (1) academic, (2) social skills and (3) attitudes toward school (Bakken, et al., 2007). In this article, I present the long-term academic and societal effects of high-quality early childhood programs, elements of high-quality programs, current enrollment trends among preschool-age children, barriers to enrollment and implications for public policy toward increasing participation.

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(Issuing in Early Childhood Education Programs Yields High Returns, continued from Page 3)

programs were 235 percent (1.4 times) more likely to be properly prepared for kindergarten. Even more impressive, students enrolled in prekindergarten centers were 335 percent (2.4 times) more likely to meet middle school requirements – an indicator for high school success. (Center for Public Education, 2007)

Defining High Quality

Early childhood programs must be staffed with adults well-versed in the social-emotional aspects and appropriate introduction of academic content of child development. Given the cultural diversity of students, it is important to note several characteristics that programs should strive for. For example, one exemplary school district has identified five key elements of an effective early childhood program: (1) Adults who are competent in the social-emotional aspects of child development as well as developmentally appropriate introduction of academic content; (2) Respect for the language and culture of the home; (3) Use of native language to support cultural concept development; (4) Developmentally appropriate activities; and (5) Communication with and support for families. (Montes, et al., 2016)

It is essential for early learning programs to nurture both the cognitive and social-emotional development of children to be successful (Bivens, et al., 2016). High-quality preschool centers require professionalized staff with credentialed teachers who achieve continuing professional development and engage in mentoring relationships (Barnett, 2009; Bivens, et al., 2016).

Research by IDRA showed how a seamlessly integrated instructional program with preschool and public school teachers can prevent children from encountering reading difficulties when they enter school. In IDRA’s Reading Early for Academic Development (READ) project, funded by the U.S. Department of Education, participating students’ standardized mean score on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-III moved from 79 to 95.5 (Rodriguez, 2006).

Additionally, a quality curriculum is required to support student’s progress and guarantee that they are well-prepared to enter formal schooling environments (Barnett, 2008; Montes, 2016). Comprehensive programs like IDRA’s Semillitas de Aprendizaje combine a strong professional development component while building students’ literacy development through bilingual instruction (Montes, 2006). The curriculum reflects elements of Ellen Galinsky’s seven essential life skills every child needs to thrive as lifelong learners and to take on life’s challenges. It also incorporates the Head Start early childhood indicators through development of literacy skills and activities that focus on listening and understanding, speaking and communicating, phonological awareness, comprehension, book knowledge and use, and prior knowledge and emergent writing. (See Page 7.)

Preschool Family Landscapes

An important goal of preschool programs is to narrow the achievement gaps that occur between students from diverse races and ethnicities and families incomes. This gap begins to appear before students enter kindergarten and can widen as soon as age 5 or 6 (Bivens, et al., 2016).

The United States is home to nearly 12 million 3- to 5-year-old children. Approximately 7,681,000 children in this age range are enrolled in some form of preprimary program. Enrollment in preschool and kindergarten continues to be an investment gap in educational achievement, particularly for children from poor families. (See Page 7.)

Barriers to Enrollment and Implications for Public Policy

Like educational gains in achievement, there continues to be an investment gap in educational activities for preschool-age children due to disparities in income. Although there is a greater number of parents from lower-income households spending on these programs, the investment gap between high-income and low-income families continues to grow larger due to the rise in income inequality (Bivens, et al., 2016).

Limited access to high-quality preschool programs has proven to be an added obstacle for parents seeking preschool education programs for their children (Barnett, 2008; Bivens, et al., 2016).

Public investment in quality preschool education programs for children from poor families improves the education and health of the future workforce and produces significant social outcomes. In such endeavors, not only add academic and social-emotional advantages, but they also increase future employment opportunities.

Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program Winning Essay – Ana Luisa Valenzuela

I’m going to be quite frank with you, I’m not going to tell you some generic story about how I joined the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program because I love working with kids. Although I really do love working with kids, that’s not the real reason I got into this program in the beginning. To be honest, I thought I would be cool to get some extra cash just for going to class. But I took a little more than just money from this program.

Little did I know that this program would impact my perspective on teachers and my life. I realized that our teachers are underequipped for what they do every day. We, as students, believe that teachers are people who nag us from eight to four, and if we don’t do our homework, they will become cold and unloving. This also made me understand how impressionable and vulnerable kids are in this world. I didn’t realize that I would be a role model for these kids… I believe that I learned more from my tutee than he learned from me. He may have learned his ABCs and his numbers, but I learned way more than that. I learned that every child needs a ‘backbone’ to support him or her.

These kids came to me with a smile and a hug every day. And that is something that cost nothing, yet means everything.

“Success isn’t about how much money you make; it’s about the difference you make in people’s lives” (Michelle Obama). This world is a very cruel and cold place, and if we do not spread kindness, love and joy, we will become cold too. We must help each other because if not, no one else will.

The IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program is an internationally-recognized crossing-age tutoring program. Since its inception in 1994, the program has kept more than 33,600 students in school, young people who were previously at risk of dropping out. According to the Valued Youth crowd, all students are valuable; none is expendable. The best of more than 645,000 children, families and educators have been positively impacted by the program. Contact IDRA for more information.
High-quality pre-kindergarten

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Semillitas de Aprendizaje™
Early Childhood Bilingual Literacy Development

Semillitas de Aprendizaje is a bilingual (Spanish/English) supplemental early childhood curriculum by IDRA that is based on the art of storytelling. It stems from research IDRA conducted on its Reading Early for Academic Development (READ) project, funded by the U.S. Department of Education, to establish in preschool centers “classrooms of excellence” that ensure reading, cognitive and emotional success for all preschool children through a print-rich environment. The curriculum reflects elements of Ellen Galinsky’s seven essential life skills every child needs to thrive as life-long learners and to take on life’s challenges. These skills give children the ability to focus on goals, expand their intellectual capacity, cultivate strong, positive self-esteem and stimulate intellectual curiosity. Using culturally appropriate and robust language encourages children to learn early and communicate what they have learned. Semillitas de Aprendizaje also incorporates the Head Start Early Childhood Professional Development Research Association indicates through literacy center activities that focus on listening and understanding, speaking and communicating, phonological awareness, comprehension, book knowledge and use, print knowledge and emerging writing.

Bi-literacy focus

• Blended Instruction
• Storytelling & Poetry Reading
• Vocabulary Development in Both English & Spanish
• Alphabetic Knowledge
• English Transition Activities

Research-Based Models of Programs and Services for Underserved Students

Bilingual/ESL Education

Compensatory Education

Sponsored for teachers and principals with bilingual and ESL certification

Accomplished learning and high-quality tutoring for language development

Content-testing for new students entering U.S. schools

Professional development for all teachers of EL students centered on language/curriculum learning competency

Coaching and mentoring of teachers

Professional learning communities

Local monitoring programs to ensure bi-literacy and bilingualization

Block scheduling

Bilingual books, supportive materials and technology, and curriculum

Family engagement

Smaller class sizes

Smaller class sizes

High-quality pre-kindergarten

High-quality pre-kindergarten

In Person Training

Customized Training

10 Storybooks – beautifully-illustrated culturally-relevant bilingual stories with rich vocabulary

10 Big Books – abridged versions of the bilingual storybooks designed for classroom interaction

15 Preschool Math Books - for classroom and home use focusing on numeracy and social-emotional development (bilingual)

20 Cartitas – Letters Home – with family activities for teachers to send home for parents related to the 10 stories

20 Storytelling Videos – stories are brought to life through engaging storytelling in Spanish and story reading in English

For more information about Semillitas de Aprendizaje & other IDRA programs, contact IDRA at (210) 534-7800 or 1-800-IDRA-INFO. www.idra.org
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Annual Report Released

Keeping the Promise – Putting Children First
Equal Educational Opportunity for Every Child Through Strong Public Schools

IDRA’s 2016 Annual Report, Keeping the Promise – Putting Children First – Equal Educational Opportunity for Every Child Through Strong Public Schools, is now available online. Grounded in the promises to children, families and communities that guide our work, the report highlights how IDRA and our partners are building national connections and networks for strong public schools, elevating transformative models for education equality, and crossing borders from research to practice to secure systemic solutions.

The report is online at Issuu at http://budurl.com/IDRAar16is and as a PDF at http://budurl.com/IDRAar16pdf.