

The Effects of Tulsa's Pre-K Program on Middle School Student Performance

William T. Gormley, Jr.

McCourt School of Public Policy, Georgetown University

Deborah Phillips

Department of Psychology, Georgetown University

Sara Anderson

Department of Learning Sciences and Human Development, West Virginia University

Presented at Federal Reserve Board Conference, Washington, D.C., March, 2017

Caution: Not for citation or attribution without lead author's permission.

Abstract

As states have upgraded their commitment to pre-K education over the past two decades, questions have arisen. Critics argue that program effects are likely to fade out or disappear over time, while supporters contend that program effects are likely to persist under certain conditions. Do the positive effects of Tulsa, Oklahoma's universal school-based pre-K program on school readiness in kindergarten persist through middle school? Using data from Tulsa Public Schools, three neighboring school districts, and the state of Oklahoma, and propensity score weighting, we estimate program effects on academic success and progress. We find enduring effects on math achievement test scores, enrollment in honors courses, and grade retention for students as a whole, enduring effects on several outcomes for free-lunch-eligible children and English language learners, and miscellaneous but more modest effects for other subgroups. We conclude that some effects of a high-quality pre-K program persist, at reduced levels, into middle school, while others disappear.

Key words: pre-K, fade out, academic success, academic progress