



## Focus: Culture of Poverty Myths

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# 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

(Tying the Knot Between School Finance Policy and Meeting the Educational Needs of Underserved Students, continued from Page 1)

resulting in a recommendation for a “beginning” bilingual weight of 0.15 for bilingual education programs, with an increase to 0.40 in two years. The governor’s proposal was defeated, and the allotment was instead set at a substantially reduced rate (Dietz, 2004). Texas has followed these failed policies for decades, ignoring other cost studies. The underperformance of English learner (EL) and low-income students reflects these policies (IDRA, 2017).

Cost studies can, however, fail to adequately consider the needs of underserved students, including English learner and low-income students. These deficiencies may result from either a lack of expertise of empaneled experts or a deficit-oriented perspective of the capabilities of underserved students.

For example, a professional judgment panel may not have strong experts in EL programs who are familiar with critical, research-based services. In an evidence-based study, experts may not distinguish between language needs for EL students and their content needs associated with their poverty.

In a cost-function analysis, experts may lower the expected pass rates for certain underserved groups due to past performance under an inadequately funded school system, rather than costing out their potential success in an adequately funded system. In a successful school study, experts may highlight lower spending schools that enroll fewer underserved students, thus failing to capture the costs associated with successful programs for underserved students.

**Linking Research-Based Practices to Cost with School Finance Policy**

While money alone will not ensure a high-quality education for underserved students, money well spent on research-based practices and monitored

Type	Methodology	State Examples*
Cost-function	Determines how much a district would need to spend to reach a certain performance target, in light of particular student characteristics.	Arizona, California, Georgia, Kansas, Missouri, New York, Texas
Evidence-Based	Relies on a combination of effective schools research in tandem with expert panels to define and cost out “effective” educational practices.	Arizona, Arkansas, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, New Jersey, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, Vermont, Washington, Wisconsin, Wyoming, Texas
Expert/Professional Judgment	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.	Colorado, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, South Carolina, Washington, New York
Successful Schools/Districts	Based on data on existing school operations, followed by development of costs actually experienced in those settings.	Ohio, Mississippi, Illinois, Maryland, Kansas, Louisiana, Colorado, Missouri, New Hampshire, New York

\*State examples derived in part from (Rebell, 2006).

effectively can lead to more effective educational opportunities and success.

For example, research shows that reduced class sizes can have an appreciable impact on achievement and lifetime outcomes for students of color 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-

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# 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, 2017). 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 preprimary programs (NCES, 2016).

Studies have found many long-term benefits of preprimary education across three broad categories: (1) academics, (2) social skills and (3) attitudes toward school (Bakken, et al., 2017). 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.

**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., 2017).

Gains in standardized test scores are a significant outcome in many research studies on preprimary education. A growing number of studies associate

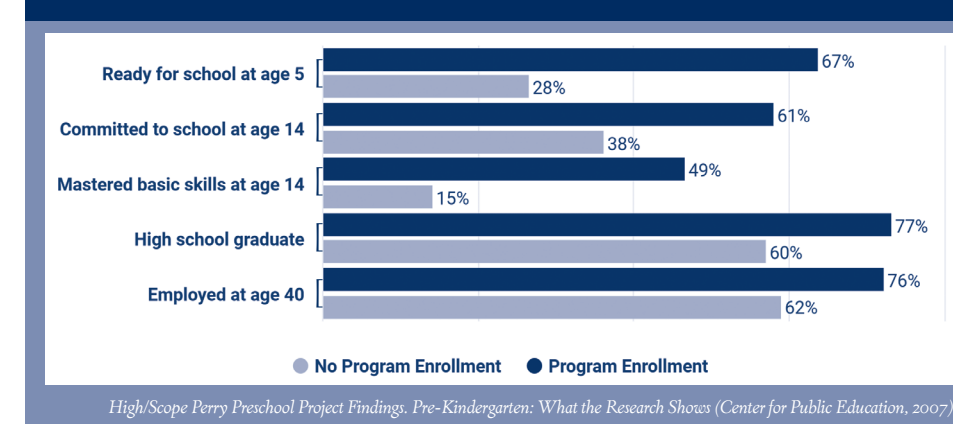
high-quality early childhood program participation with improved scores on tests taken at older grade levels (Bivens, et al., 2016). Early childhood programs also are credited with improving children’s social development, and reducing disruptive behaviors and the number of juvenile arrests (Bakken, et al., 2017; Bivens, et al., 2016).

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, 2013).

The High/Scope Perry Preschool Project found gains in student achievement as a result of participation in early childhood education programs (see chart below). The project revealed improved outcomes in each of five areas. Most notably, being school-ready by the age of 5 and having mastered basic skills at 14 showed the greatest impact. Students participating in preprimary education

*Even more impressive, students enrolled in prekindergarten centers were 325 percent (3.25 times) more likely to meet middle school requirements – an indicator for high school success.*

## Benefits of Early Childhood Education Enrollment for Children in Low-income Families



High/Scope Perry Preschool Project Findings. Pre-Kindergarten: What the Research Shows (Center for Public Education, 2007).



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

programs were 239 percent (2.4 times) more likely to be properly prepared for kindergarten. Even more impressive, students enrolled in prekindergarten centers were 325 percent (3.25 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 language and concept development; (4) Developmentally appropriate activities; and (5) Communication with and support for families (Montemayor, 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, 2008; 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 92 (Rodríguez, 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, 2016). 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. It also

	Preschool				Kindergarten		
	Total	Full Day	Half Day	Total Preschool	Full Day	Half Day	Total Kinder
<b>Number of parents or guardians in the household</b>							
One parent or guardian	63.4	21.1	14.8	35.9	23.6	4.0	27.6
Two parents or guardians	64.6	18.0	20.0	38.1	21.1	5.4	26.5
<b>Mother's current employment status</b>							
Employed	67.5	21.6	18.2	39.8	22.5	5.1	27.6
Unemployed	63.2	20.6	16.9	37.5	20.7	5.1	25.8
Not working	58.3	13.6	19.5	33.1	20.3	4.9	25.2
No mother in the home	67.5	21.9	15.8	37.8	26.3	3.4	29.7
<b>Father's current employment status</b>							
Employed	65.3	18.6	20.0	38.7	21.6	5.0	26.6
Unemployed	63.1	15.5	16.2	31.7	23.3	8.1	31.4
Not working	57.2	13.7	18.5	32.2	18.0	6.9	24.9
No father in the home	62.8	21.0	14.6	35.6	23.1	4.1	27.2

National Center for Educational Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics, Table 202.20. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

incorporates the Head Start early childhood competency indicators through literacy center activities that focus on listening and understanding, speaking and communicating, phonological awareness, comprehension, book knowledge and use, and print 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 family 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 is divided between preschool (37.4 percent) and kindergarten (26.8 percent). Most students (63.5 percent) are enrolled in full-time programs in either type of setting. (NCES, 2016)

Though most studies seek to investigate the benefits of a comprehensive preschool program for children from low-income families, data collected from the census do not provide parents' income (see box above). Reports only indicate the employment status and number of guardians in the home to convey the economic circumstances

of a child's family. The percentages in the table indicate comparable participation across families, however, at 64.2 percent enrollment, there is a clear need for increased participation for all preschool-age children.

### Barriers to Enrollment and Implications for Public Policy

Like educational gaps 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 preprimary learning centers 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 prekindergarten education programs for children from poor families improves the education and health of the future workforce and produces significant social outcomes. In addition, such endeavors not only afford academic and social-emotional advantages, but they also increase future employment opportunities. (cont. on Page 6)



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

Editor's Note: IDRA sponsored a national essay competition among participants in the IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, a nationally-recognized cross-age tutoring program of IDRA. Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program tutors wrote about how the program helps them do better in school and how they help their tutees to do better. Six students received prizes. Below is one of the winning essays. Others are posted on the IDRA website ([www.idra.org](http://www.idra.org)).



**High School First Place**  
**Ana Luisa Valenzuela**  
12th grade, Odessa High School, Ector County ISD, Texas

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, the reason I joined was because I thought it 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 underappreciated for what they do every day. We, as students, believe that teachers are people who nag us from eight to four, but they are actually building blocks for our future. I thank you for that.

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. Every day that I enter my classroom, I get welcomed with hugs and artwork that my tutee and his classmates created. Every day, I get told stories about what they did the previous day. I feel like if a kid can tell you about their day or a secret, you are a role model and, more importantly, a friend to them.

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. I learned that not every child has that stability at home and, as a random stranger, I became that backbone for some of those kids who didn't have anyone.

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 cross-age tutoring program. Since its inception in 1984, 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 creed, all students are valuable; none is expendable. The lives of more than 646,000 children, families and educators have been positively impacted by the program. Contact IDRA for more information.



### Learn more about the IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program

**Website:** Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program – Learn more about the program and how to bring it to your school

**Video:** Dropout Prevention that Works – Overview of how the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program impacts students and schools [12 min.]

**Winning Essays:** Full text of the six winning essays

<http://budurl.com/IDRAVYP>

*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.*



(Tying the Knot Between School Finance Policy and Meeting the Educational Needs of Underserved Students, continued from Page 2)

day pre-kindergarten programs; sustain teacher mentoring programs; and ensure other research-based opportunities that lead to student success – especially for underserved communities. The table at right is a nonexclusive listing of services that can support improved learning opportunities for underserved students.

**Conclusion**

While policymakers cannot guarantee results in education performance, they can help ensure educational opportunities for all students with effective school finance policies. To get there, state-houses must tie educational needs and research-based opportunities with the actual costs.

In addition to costs identified above for underserved students, other actual costs must be considered for regular programs and services, such as the costs of sustaining a high-quality teaching and school leader force, transportation, facilities, technology and curriculum, custodial services, professional development, innovation and enrichment, and small district adjustments, among others. Once policymakers understand the actual costs of providing essential educational opportunities, they can get to work on equitably funding those opportunities for all children in all schools.

**Resources**

Cortez, A. (2012). *Report of the Intercultural Development Research Association Related to the Extent of Equity in the Texas School Finance System and Its Impact on Selected Student Related Issues, Prepared for the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund in Texas Taxpayer & Student Fairness Coalition v. Williams*, No. D-1-GN-11-003130, Travis Co. District Court (San Antonio, Texas: Intercultural Development Research Association).

**Research-Based Examples of Programs and Services for Underserved Students**

Bilingual/ESL Education	Compensatory Education
Stipends for teachers and principals with bilingual and ESL certification	Stipends for teaching in schools with higher populations of economically disadvantaged students
Accelerated learning and high-quality tutoring for language development	Accelerated learning and high-quality tutoring for content mastery
Content-testing for new students first entering U.S. schools	Socio-economic school integration plans
Professional development for all teachers of EL students centered on language/content learning	Professional development for all teachers on cultural competency
Coaching and mentoring of teachers	Professional learning communities
Local monitoring programs to ensure bi-literacy and bilingualism	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

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ties and earnings (Bivens, et al., 2016). Policies that establish a national investment of this nature would move us closer to equitable educational opportunities for the next generation.

For decades, early childhood education has been encouraged to promote increased academic success in later primary and secondary grades for students from families with limited financial resources. Unfortunately, inequitable access and opportunity block preprimary participation for many students from poor and even mid-income families.

Public investment in high-quality early childhood education produces significant effects on student achievement, in-grade retention, socialization, high school graduation and future income (Bakken, et al., 2017; Barnett, 2008). These

studies provide evidence that early childhood programs greatly serve the social and academic needs of children as they enter the education system. Communities and school districts, working together, can ensure that cost, quality and access are no longer factors that dissuade parents from enrolling their young children in preschool programs. The benefits outweigh the cost and offer brighter futures for our youth.

**Resources**

Bakken, L., Brown, N. & Downing, B. (2017). "Early Childhood Education: The Long-Term Benefits," *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*.  
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**Semillitas de Aprendizaje™**  
 Early Childhood Bilingual Literacy Development



**Supplemental Early Childhood Curriculum & Training**

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 easily and communicate what they have learned. Semillitas de Aprendizaje also incorporates the **Head Start Early Childhood competency indicators** through literacy center activities that focus on listening and understanding, speaking and communicating, phonological awareness, comprehension, book knowledge and use, print knowledge and emergent writing.

**Bi-literacy Focus**

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

**Interdisciplinary Units**

- Life Skills
- STEM Focus
- Content Integration

**Technology Integration**

- Higher Order Thinking Activities
- Phonemic Awareness Exercises

Visit our website to see a sample classroom lesson, scope and sequence (two), and sample video clips from the Storytelling DVD.

[www.semillitasdeaprendizaje.com](http://www.semillitasdeaprendizaje.com)



**Semillitas de Aprendizaje Materials**

The classroom set includes the following products for \$464. Each product also is sold separately.

- ⌘ **Teacher Guide** – 10 units in 196 pages to support early childhood bilingual literacy development
- ⌘ **10 Storybooks** – beautifully-illustrated culturally-relevant bilingual stories with rich vocabulary
- ⌘ **10 Big Books** – abridged version 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

**Also Available**

- ⌘ **Customized Training** – assistance with using the materials and on creating centers of excellence, including classroom demonstrations and observations, coaching for success, nurturing of innovations, and building on existing strengths



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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/IDRAa116is> and as a PDF at <http://budurl.com/IDRAa116pdf>.



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*achieving equal educational opportunity for every child  
 through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college*