

## The Effects of Teacher Professional Development on Children's Attendance in Preschool

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### What was this study about?

When children are absent from early childhood education (ECE) at centers and preschools they are unable to fully realize the positive effects ECE can have on their lives. Younger children and those from families with lower income are more at risk for absenteeism and may benefit most from ECE. Therefore, efforts to reduce absenteeism could have greater-than-average benefits for these students.

To date, programs that attempt to reduce absenteeism in ECE and K12 focus on the parents and families of children. Programs that target teachers and preschools could also reduce absenteeism. Professional development initiatives could improve teacher's interactions with students, positively shape parental impressions of ECE, and improve teacher psychosocial wellbeing, which could reduce child absenteeism.

This study explores 1) the extent that a professional development intervention affected child absenteeism and chronic absenteeism, 2) whether impacts varied by child- and classroom-level risk factors, and 3) if impacts could be explained by changes in child-teacher interactions.

### How was this study conducted?

Data came from the National Center for Research on Early Childhood Education Professional Development Study (NCRECE PDS), a large multisite randomized control trial implemented in nine US cities that included 158 preschool and ECE centers, 250 teachers, and 942 students. NCRECE PDS took place over two phases and included two interventions that focused on improving teacher-child interactions with respect to their emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support. The first phase randomly assigned teachers to a set of 14 weekly sessions. The

second phase randomly assigned teachers to receive coaching sessions with feedback. Teachers received one, both, or none of the interventions.

### Can professional development reduce absenteeism?

Receiving one or both of the interventions caused students to be absent 1.9 fewer days over the school year, on average. In addition, the chronic absenteeism rate (defined as missing more than 10% of days of school) was reduced from 22% to 16% as a result of the intervention.

There is some evidence that the effects of the program differed by risk factor. Children from families having a lower income-to-needs ratio saw a larger-than-average reduction in absenteeism and chronic absenteeism. There was little-to-no impact for children from wealthier families. Younger children also appeared to benefit more from the program than older children. Three-year-olds in the control group had higher absence rates than four-year-olds, but there was no difference in absence rates by age in the intervention group. At the class-level, there is suggestive evidence that effects were larger than average in classrooms where more students were living in poverty, but the results were inconclusive.

There was not clear evidence the improvements in classroom quality drove the reductions in student absenteeism.

Overall, the research suggests that professional development can meaningfully improve children's attendance and participation in early childhood education opportunities. The benefits appear to primarily accrue to children from low-income families and younger children.

#### Full Article Citation:

Hanno, E. C., & Gonzalez, K. E. (2020). [The Effects of Teacher Professional Development on Children's Attendance in Preschool](https://doi.org/10.1080/19345747.2019.1634170). *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness*, 13(1), 3–28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19345747.2019.1634170>