SREE 2014: Symposium submission

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Title
Replication of the Effects of Prekindergarten Education When Taken to Scale at a State Level

First and second choice of conference section

1. Early Learning and Education
2. Understanding the Effects of Education Policies

Symposium justification

Researchers, policy makers, practitioners, and the public rely heavily on a few small-scale intensive prekindergarten programs when discussing what we know about the potential effects of preschool education. It is unknown whether the long-term benefits found for these small, intensive programs can be achieved by the state-funded programs in place today. No experimental studies have yet investigated the long-term effects of any scaled-up state pre-k program. Most of the existing studies of preschool programs, however dissimilar to public pre-k programs, have typically found gains in cognitive skills immediately following the program that then diminished in later years. But those same studies have also often found long-term impacts on other indicators of performance such as grade retention, attendance, disciplinary actions, special education referrals, and graduation rates. The three papers presented in this symposium revolve around a large-scale evaluation of a public prekindergarten program being implemented state-wide in Tennessee. Results from the evaluation to date bring up questions about the size of effects that can be expected from prekindergarten programs that are implemented at such a large scale. The first paper will present results from the randomized control trial portion of this large study of the effectiveness of the Tennessee’s Voluntary Pre-K (TN-VPK) program in the pre-k year and through two years following the intervention. Effects on both cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes to date will be presented. The second paper will discuss variation in immediate average pre-k gains across classrooms. This paper demonstrates the large variability in individual classroom effects when a program is taken to scale. The last paper in this symposium will present data from the age-cutoff regression discontinuity portion of the study and will involve data from the extensive classroom observations in representative classrooms across the state. They yield a mixed picture of the nature of instruction across the state, both in overall quality and in variation among classrooms. Collectively, these presentations will speak to the replicability of small-scale intensive programmatic effects when such programs are scaled up and delivered state-wide.