



In January 2022, researchers Dale Farran, Mark Lipsey, Kelley Durkin and Sarah Wiesen released the [latest findings](#) of a multi-year study following children who participated in Tennessee’s Voluntary Pre-K (VPK) program in 2009-10 and 2010-11 school years. In sum, the study finds that the VPK children were doing worse than their control group peers by the end of sixth grade in academic achievement, discipline issues and special education referrals.

Tennesseeans for Quality Early Education highlights the following points in response to the study.

- **TN Pre-K works.** Previous studies by some of the same researchers tracking the same cohort of children show the benefits of the VPK program.
 - A [2015 study](#) found that those who attended VPK were significantly better prepared for kindergarten than their non-VPK peers.
 - A [2019 study](#) found that the children who went on to high-quality kindergarten through third grade classrooms with highly effective teachers maintained the academic edge over their peers up until that time.
- **Documented ROI.** There is a tremendous body of research documenting the benefits of high-quality preschool. Increased academic and career achievement as well as reduced costs in remedial education, health and criminal justice system expenditures led to Nobel Prize-winning economist James Heckman documenting returns as high as \$7 – \$10 for every \$1 invested in high-quality Pre-K for economically-disadvantaged children.
- **Tennessee’s VPK program has made significant improvements since 2011 thanks to the Pre-K Quality Act of 2016.** Children who enter Tennessee Pre-K classrooms today have a very different experience from those who participated between 2009 and 2011. Since that time, the VPK program has been transformed in many ways – most of which are a direct result of the Tennessee General Assembly passing the Pre-K Quality Act in 2016.
 - Thanks to [enhancements in curriculum, instruction, data and accountability](#), Tennessee is now one of only 12 states that meet [9 out of 10 quality standard benchmarks](#) for effectiveness of preschool education programs according to the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER).
- **The study underscores that quality matters – not only for Pre-K programs, but also for our early learning continuum Pre-K through third grade (and beyond).** Pre-K cannot be expected to inoculate children against poor subsequent learning experiences. Quality early education – including high-performing elementary schools and highly effective teachers – must be sustained through third grade if we are to address the fact that statewide more than two-thirds of Tennessee’s third graders aren’t proficient in reading or in math. Enhancing the quality of early education is a fundamental strategy to reverse this unacceptable trend and give our students a better future.
- **It’s what Tennesseans want.** [A recent voter poll conducted by Tennesseeans for Quality Early Education](#) shows that Tennessee Democrats and Republicans are unified in their support of expanding early education as a fundamental strategy to improve student achievement. Eighty-nine percent said they believe our state’s Voluntary Pre-K program should be available to all Tennessee 4-year-olds, and 87 percent support increasing state funding to make that possible.