

02/28/2007 Re: Testimony for Education Committee hearing on increased spending for Education in CT as part of Governor Rell's new budget.

From: Judy Aron, 40 North Quaker Lane, West Hartford CT 06119

Dear Committee Members,

Taxpayers and businesses are begging you...NO MORE TAXES! We are losing population because it is just too expensive to live and work in CT. The statistics (according to Forbes Forbes, 8/16/06) bear this out.

With 50 being the worst:

Connecticut ranks 43rd in the list of the Cost of Doing Business

Connecticut ranks 28th in Economic Climate (bottom half)

Connecticut ranks 23rd in growth prospects

With regard to the investment on education spending:

There are literally scores of articles that have been written on the outcomes of preschool, especially as seen as a return on investment, and closing the achievement gap. Some cite incredible conclusions like pre-k students won't end up in jail, or that they make better citizens, or that they show more advanced brain scans, or that will have more successful lives. **You have to be aware and also take into account the studies that dispute these findings.** They are studies that are just as legitimate, and even our Co-Chair of this Committee, Thomas Gaffey, has concurred based on a letter that he wrote to State Board of Education Chair Alan Taylor this past August (see attached).

Studies have shown that it causes more harm than good for kids to be wrested from their homes earlier, or that it is causing young ones too much stress and makes them more aggressive, or that any gains made early on just dissipate later (the "fadeout effect"). One particular study is by, researchers Katherine Magnuson, Christopher Ruhm, and Jane Waldfogel conclude in their paper, "Does Prekindergarten Improve School Preparation and Performance?" ([NBER Working Paper No. 10452](#)) that early education does increase reading and mathematics skills at school entry, **but it also boosts children's classroom behavioral problems and reduces their self-control.** Further, for most children **the positive effects of pre-kindergarten on skills largely dissipate by the spring of first grade, although the negative behavioral effects continue.** In the study, the authors take account of many factors affecting a child, including family background and neighborhood characteristics. These factors include race/ethnicity, age, health status at birth, height, weight, and gender, family income related to need, language spoken in the home, and so on.

Does preschool help some kids? Sure - for those kids who have unstable homes, or parents who are less than nurturing, it can be beneficial. No one disputes this. Kids need a safe, loving, and nurturing environment. But even Headstart has been coming under fire for being ineffective. One article reports this: *"The naked truth is that one to two years after entering public school, children from Head Start programs score no differently on tests of academic achievement, social behavior, emotional adjustment and other measurable outcomes from their non-Head Start peers."*

States who have been dumping more money into pre-k are already re-examining their strategy because they are not finding that the billions of dollars in investment in pre-k to be paying off. Pre-school initiatives are in fact falling short. What it is doing instead is causing stress in young kids and other problems.

The efficacy of spending more money on pre-k hasn't worked here in CT so why are legislators now

looking to expand pre-k programs? I'll tell you why: It is because the only ones who stand to benefit from these programs are the teachers unions who will be growing their membership rolls by adding "certified pre-k" teachers to the public school employment machine. Taxpayers will dole out more money for more teachers, more benefits, more space in schools and more resources required.

One published article states: "*Universal preschool will provide job security for teachers and education administrators and provide lucrative contracts for specialty interest groups such as curriculum providers, transportation providers, food service providers, construction companies that build schools, maintenance and custodial services, school psychologists, and drug companies. Drug companies? Yes! Preschoolers will be tested, and funding of preschools will be based on test results. What happens when a kid doesn't test well? A small child's inability to focus could be diagnosed as ADD. What will be the solution - Ritalin for 3-year-olds?*"

From a social, psychological, academic and emotional standpoint Pre-School can be counterproductive and even damaging. With all the money tied up in the effort it is obvious that it's not entirely "For the Kids" at all. Follow the money and you'll see who really benefits: Educrats, administrators, credentialing organizations, unions and a host of other people who benefit from more school spending.

Instead of satisfying the teachers union by allowing pre-k to be subsumed into public education and adding to the NEA/CEA's membership rosters we ought to really do some meaningful education reform to eliminate or fix the programs that do not work. We cannot merely throw more money at the problem and we certainly shouldn't be throwing younger kids into the mix. They ought to be concentrating on the kids who are in school instead of marching more into the door earlier.

I believe strongly that this budget ought to be rejected. The taxation in this state is already sufficient, and education is funded enough and the results of all this spending have shown that the more money spent the worse we seem to be doing.

Consider the facts:

-Connecticut spends more, per pupil, on its K-12 government-school system than 45 other states. Only New Jersey (\$10,235), New York (\$10,002), Vermont (\$9,915), and Wyoming (\$9,439) rank higher than Connecticut (\$9,188.)

-Teachers in Connecticut earn an average salary of \$57,337, the highest among the states.

-School-construction costs represent a substantial portion of the state's highest-in-the-nation bonded indebtedness. In 2002, 46 percent of Connecticut's general-obligation bonding was devoted to school construction.

Yet:

-Studies prove that more education spending do not translate into better school performance.

-The high-school dropout rate for Connecticut's class of 2001 was approximately 30 percent.

-Connecticut's average combined SAT score is only slightly higher than the national average. Between 1988 and 2003, the state's average combined SAT score was essentially flat, rising by 1.48 percent.

Please NO MORE TAXES!!! We need to re-examine our programs and figure out what works and what doesn't.

Thank you,
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Please see attached:

Preschool for all? No thanks

By Susan Wight

Thursday, 22 February 2007

Politicians are calling for compulsory preschool and there is a lot of rhetoric around about ensuring all children have the benefits of a preschool education so they are not left behind when they begin school. But is compulsory preschool something we really want?

Education Minister, Julie Bishop's argument in favour of compulsory preschool is: "many studies and research and analysis show that investment in high quality, large scale, early childhood programs find that early learning experiences, including pre-literacy and numeracy skills make the transition to school easier for children, and it increases the chances of school success."

University studies are often quoted to support the perceived academic benefits of preschool. What is not often mentioned is that, while these studies demonstrate preschool in a favourable light when compared with an impoverished home environment, preschool does not compare favourably with the average home environment.

Even Professor Edward Zigler, credited as "the father of Headstart" a widespread American preschool program admits "there is a large body of evidence that there is little to be gained by exposing middle class children to early education ... (and) evidence that indicates early schooling is inappropriate for many four-year-olds, and that it may be harmful to their development".

If preschool were truly beneficial in terms of giving children a head start, those places with some form of compulsory preschool should do demonstrably better academically. The evidence does not bear this out.

For example, the two states of America which have compulsory preschool, Georgia and Oklahoma, have the lowest results for fourth grade reading tests in the country.

In 2000, the Program for International Study Assessment (PISA) compared the academic scores of children from 32 industrialised nations in reading literacy, maths and science. The results showed that in countries where schooling starts at a young age they do not consistently outperform those who start later.

Finland, which has a compulsory schooling age of seven, held the top ranking in all test subjects of the Third International Mathematics and Science (TIMS) results in 1999.

Singapore, which also scored highly in the PISA and TIMS assessments, has no publicly funded early education programs.

By contrast, Sweden, which has one of the most comprehensive early child-care programs in Europe, was one of the lowest scoring nations.

Hungary and Czechoslovakia, cut their day-care programs significantly in the 1990s after studies determined that institutional care damages preschool-aged children.

Perhaps most tellingly of all, the longitudinal studies often quoted to argue an academic advantage provided by preschool for lower socio-economic groups, actually also show that this "advantage" disappears by grade three.

But what about the much-touted social benefits of preschool programs? Here again, there is research to refute this. A 2005 Stanford University study reported: "We find that attendance in preschool centers, even for short periods of time each week, hinder the rate at which young children develop social skills and display the motivation to engage in classroom tasks, as reported by their [prep] teachers."

In 1986, Tizzard and Hughes compared the language environments at home and in preschools in the UK. Their method involved tape-recording the conversations of four-year-old girls at preschool in the morning and again at home with their mothers in the afternoon. They reported:

We became increasingly aware of how rich this [home] environment was for all the children (working-class and middle-class). The conversations between the children and their mothers ranged freely over a variety of topics. The idea that children's interests were restricted to play and TV was clearly untenable.

At home the children discussed topics like work, the family, birth, growing up, and death; they talked with their mothers about things they had done together in the past, and their plans for the future; they puzzled over such diverse topics as the shape of roofs and chairs, the nature of Father Christmas, and whether the Queen wears curlers in bed.

Many of these conversations took place during recognisably educational contexts - such as during play or while reading books - but many did not. A large number of the more fruitful conversations simply cropped up as the children and their mothers went about their afternoon's business at home - having lunch, planning shopping expeditions, feeding the baby and so on.

When we came to analyse the conversations between these same children and their [preschool] teachers, we could not avoid being disappointed. The children were certainly happy at school, for much of the time absorbed in play. However, their conversations with their teachers made a sharp contrast to those with their mothers.

The richness, depth and variety which characterised the home conversations were sadly missing. So too was the sense of intellectual struggle, and of the real attempts to communicate being made by both sides.

The questioning, puzzling child which we were so taken with at home was gone: in her place was a child who, when talking to staff, seemed subdued, and whose conversations with adults were mainly restricted to answering questions rather than asking them, or taking part in minimal exchanges about the whereabouts of other children and play materials.

In all this research, it is difficult to sort out to what extent there is a difference between compulsory preschool programs and optional preschool but it seems that there is enough evidence both to question the push towards compulsory preschool and to throw doubt on the theory that preschool is beneficial for all.

Children at home with their families are not disadvantaged. Indeed they are very likely better off. So if your child does not wish to go to kindergarten, or you do not wish to send them, rest assured that you are not depriving them.

Relationships are the most important part of life. For small children especially, the time spent in the secure home environment is invaluable. Contrary to popular opinion, forcing children to separate from their parents before they are ready to is not necessary.

Preschool should remain optional so that parents are in control of the amount of time their children spend there. For some families this will be full time, for others, no time at all, but as a society we should stop pressuring families into thinking that a decision not to preschool their child is somehow irresponsible and will disadvantage the child. The evidence just does not support this view.

Throughout history small children have always been nurtured by their parents. Parents talk, read and sing to their preschoolers; they answer questions; they play games; they provide stimulating experiences and the security of cuddles and they accompany their children out into the world as mentor guides who interpret and explain new sights and experiences.

Some families wish to supplement this rich rewarding education with a preschool experience. By all means make preschool freely available to all who wish to use it but why make it compulsory?

Susan Wight is a Victorian mother who, together with her husband, home educates her three children. She is co-editor and a regular writer for *Otherways* the magazine of the Home Education Network.