

# Family income, expectations tied to kindergarten performance

January 19 2015, by Randy Dotinga, Healthday Reporter

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Kids scored better overall when their parents focused more on reading, computer use and preschool.

(HealthDay)—U.S. children entering kindergarten do worse on tests when they're from poorer families with lower expectations and less focus on reading, computer use and preschool attendance, new research suggests.

The findings point to the [importance](#) of doing more to prepare [children](#) for [kindergarten](#), said study co-author Dr. Neal Halfon, director of the Center for Healthier Children, Families & Communities at the University of California, Los Angeles.

"The good news is that there are some kids doing really well," he said. "And there are a lot of seemingly disadvantaged kids who achieve much

beyond what might be predicted for them because they have parents who are managing to provide them what they need."

At issue: What do kids need to succeed? The researchers sought to dig deeply into statistics to better understand the role of factors like poverty. "We didn't want to just look at poor kids versus rich kids, or poor versus all others," Halfon said.

The researchers wanted to test whether it's actually true—as intuition would suggest—that "you'll do better if you get read to more, you go to [preschool](#) more, you have more regular routines and you have more-educated parents," Halfon added.

The researchers examined results of a study of 6,600 U.S. English- and Spanish-speaking children who were born in 2001. The kids took math and reading tests when they entered kindergarten, and their parents answered survey questions. The investigators then adjusted the results so they wouldn't be thrown off by high or low numbers of certain types of kids.

The study authors found that children from poorer families did worse on the tests, even if the kids weren't from families below the poverty line.

There were other differences between high and low scorers. For example, only 57 percent of parents of kids who scored the worst expected their child to attend college, compared to 96 percent of parents of children who scored the highest.

In addition, preschool attendance was more common among those who scored the best compared to those who scored the worst—89 percent versus 64 percent. Computer use at home was also more common for the higher scorers—84 percent compared to 27 percent. Parents also read more to the kids who scored the best, the findings showed.

Halfon said parental expectations and planning had a big impact as to whether kids went to preschool. "The kind of attitude and plan that parents bring to childrearing is really important," he said.

Karen Smith, a pediatric psychologist with the University of Texas Medical Branch, praised the study and said it points to the importance of helping poorer parents develop parenting skills and start believing they can really support their children.

"Parents from more affluent families know what to do when it comes to reading to their [kids](#), probably because they've been read to," Smith said. Poorer parents "may not even have the money for books, and maybe they weren't read to themselves."

Smith and Halfon agreed that it's crucial to teach poorer parents how to be better at parenting. Still, Halfon said, "there's no single one magic bullet that's going to solve the problem," not even widening access to preschool. "That's necessary," he said, "but it's probably not sufficient."

The study appears online Jan. 19 and in the February print issue of *Pediatrics*.

**More information:** For more about parenting, visit the [U.S. National Library of Medicine](#).

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