

New Research Finds Lasting Positive Impact of Early Kindergarten Transition Program on Student Attendance, Literacy Skills

Innovative Research Partnership Evaluates Program Effectiveness, Informs Data-Driven Decisions for District Leaders, Builds Capacity for Quality Research

Portland, Ore. – April 11, 2017 – A new five-year retrospective evaluation [study](#) found that students who participated in an [Early Kindergarten Transition \(EKT\) program](#) showed higher attendance rates and higher early literacy skills when compared to their non-participating peers. What’s more, these trends continued over time, in kindergarten and later grades.

The targeted intervention, offered in 14 Title I elementary schools in Portland Public Schools, is designed to help families with students who may struggle with the transition to kindergarten. These are primarily children who have not had a structured preschool experience, have a primary language other than English, or have had attendance or behavior issues while enrolled in Head Start.

The research, recently published in the *Journal of Applied Research on Children: Informing Policy for Children at Risk*, was conducted by the [Multnomah County Partnership for Education Research](#) (MCPER). MCPER was developed by the University of Portland School of Education and the not-for-profit educational services organization NWEA to assist the county’s six largest public school districts, including Portland Public Schools, in evaluating the effectiveness of education programs and making informed, data-driven decisions to increase student learning and equity.

“The results of our study on the EKT program show the positive and lasting impact of a low-cost, targeted intervention designed to encourage family engagement and support student achievement—valuable data that district stakeholders can use moving forward,” said Dr. Beth Tarasawa, Manager for Education Research Partnerships at NWEA and lead researcher on the study.

The EKT program is a free, three-week summer program designed to increase parental involvement, reduce chronic absenteeism, and enhance the development of early literacy skills—all early indicators of long-term academic success. During the program,

incoming kindergarteners work with teachers to practice school routines and gain literacy skills, and parents connect with school staff and learn how to support their children's learning at home.

“The EKT program helps school staff develop strong, authentic partnerships with families and students *before* school starts,” said Nancy Hauth, Program Manager of Kindergarten and Early Learning at Portland Public Schools. “This early ‘home to school’ connection is powerful and helps all of our students succeed. We’re thrilled that the results of our EKT program validate that we are on the right path with our youngest students.”

The study followed a total of 459 students who participated in the EKT program. Results showed that, when compared to non-EKT students, participating students’ attendance rates remained higher over time, a higher proportion met early literacy benchmarks, and a smaller proportion were deemed in need of intensive literacy support. The evaluation will extend to include this summer’s participating students in order to provide ongoing tracking of the efficacy of the EKT program.

“Our district leadership needs to know what’s working in our schools, and we need actionable data to make decisions,” said Dr. Elise Christiansen, System Planning and Performance Manager, Evaluation and Research Unit, System Planning and Performance Department at Portland Public Schools. “With MCPER, we determine the initiatives we want to examine, identify the data we need, and apply what we learn from the findings to continually improve how we support student learning. This research enables us to remain accountable to the students, families, and communities that we serve.”

Applications are currently being accepted for the summer 2017 EKT program, which will be held from July 17 – August 4. For more information, please visit the Portland Public Schools [website](#).

For more information about MCPER and how the partnership’s work supports school districts, please visit their [website](#).

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About Portland Public Schools

Portland Public Schools, founded in 1851, is a PK-12 urban school district in Portland, Oregon. With more than 49,000 students in 78 schools, it is one of the largest school districts in the Pacific Northwest. With a focus on closing the racial educational achievement gap, PPS is at its highest graduation rate in at least 15 years and is enjoying its seventh straight year of enrollment growth.

About Multnomah County Partnership for Education Research

MCPER is an ongoing research partnership between the not-for-profit education services organization NWEA, the School of Education at the University of Portland, and

six school districts in Multnomah County. Districts identify the data they need to inform education policy and improve instruction and learning, and MCPER provides the high-quality program evaluations and real-time research that many districts lack the capacity to lead on their own.

About University of Portland School of Education

Founded in 1901, the University of Portland (UP) serves over 3900 students with more than 70 challenging academic programs. It has been ranked: Top 10 in the West by *U.S News and World Report* (19 consecutive years), and one of the best teaching universities in the West by *Barron's Best Buys*. In 2013, the University's School of Education (SOE) received national reaccreditation by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE).

About NWEA

NWEA™ is a global not-for-profit educational services organization with nearly 40 years of expertise in providing innovative assessment solutions, including the Measures of Academic Progress® (MAP®) growth assessment. In addition to solutions and professional learning services, NWEA leads research supporting assessment validity and data interpretation. Educators in more than 8,500 schools, districts, and education agencies worldwide use NWEA pre-K – 12 assessments with over nine million students.