



EARLY LEARNING FAQs FADE OUT

WHAT IS FADE OUT?

Fade out is the theory that gains made in high-quality early learning settings diminish over time, namely by third grade.

HOW IS FADE OUT MEASURED?

While there is no universally accepted standard, people who are concerned about fade out generally look at academic skill data. They typically do not also cite information about social-emotional or other developmental skills – essential elements in a child’s healthy growth and increasingly researched components of school and career success.

IS FADE OUT A REAL PROBLEM?

The facts are in on this now, and the answer is no. The most recent studies have proven that children who experience high-quality early education develop stronger social-emotional skills. Those skills lead to many positive outcomes, such as higher rates of high school graduation, college graduation and employment, lower rates of arrests and incarceration, and better long-term health outcomes. A 2017 study found that eight years after students completed Tulsa, Oklahoma’s universal preschool program, they performed better in math, were more likely to enroll in advanced courses and did not repeat grades as often as those not enrolled in the program.

What new research points out is that the real issue is that children who receive high-quality early education often have their progress slowed upon entering the K-12 system. That’s because teachers must focus on building the skills of children who were not enrolled in early learning programs. This is called “catch up” and presents a different problem for educational leaders and policy makers.

WHAT ARE STEPS TO COUNTER THIS CATCH UP CHALLENGE?

Research and the experiences of other states suggest that having strong continuity and coordination between early education and K-12 systems is critical. The quality of education children receive after entering the K-12 system truly matters. Poor instruction, lack of alignment and spending instructional time “catching up” other children not exposed to high-quality early learning can each diminish some of the gains made in early education. If children do not continuously have opportunities to practice the skills they already learned, they risk losing them. Rather than focusing on fighting a “fade out” problem that research doesn’t back up, we can avoid the “catch up” challenge by increasing access to high-quality early learning opportunities for more children.

INFORMATION IN THIS DOCUMENT WAS RETRIEVED FROM THE FOLLOWING SOURCES:

Dana Charles McCoy, Hirokazu Yoshikawa, Kathleen M. Ziol-Guest, Greg J. Duncan, Holly S. Schindler, Katherine Magnuson, Rui Yang, Andrew Koepp, Jack P. Shonkoff. (2017). “Impacts of Early Childhood Education on Medium- and Long-Term Educational Outcomes.” Educational Researcher. Retrieved from <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.3102/0013189X17737739>

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James Heckman. (2018). The Heckman Equation. Retrieved from: <https://heckmanequation.org>

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