

Starting Early on a New Educational Agenda for the United States

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A headline in the July 23, 2010, *New York Times* read “Once a Leader, U.S. Lags in College Degrees” (Lewin, 2010). The article goes on to describe the contents of a report issued on the previous day by the College Board warning that “the growing gap between the United States and other countries threatens to undermine American economic competitiveness” (p. A11). In the following days, the media was abuzz with the statistic that the United States ranks 12th among 36 developed nations in the proportion of 25- to 34-year-olds with college degrees. Commentators discussed the long-term economic implications, and many expressed grave concerns about the state of higher education in the United States.

Amid this rising tide of concern about the standing of the United States in education, the present article on preschool education could not be more timely. Four leading investigators in the field, Robert Pianta, W. Steven Barnett, Margaret Burchinal, and Kathy Thornberg, carefully delineate the effects, including the effects on college attendance rates, of

preschool education. The authors document scientific progress on the ingredients for effective preschool education, and the findings provide a template for the development of new programs. The authors also highlight the gaps in our knowledge and the critical areas for further investigation. While the research provides strong evidence for the long-term benefits, both to children and communities, of quality preschool education, the authors argue persuasively that the benefits could be further enhanced. What follows is a superb and scholarly overview of what we know, what we need to know, and what, based on the evidence, we can do. It behooves parents, educators, community leaders, and policy makers to carefully consider the recommendations offered by Dr. Pianta and his coauthors.

Reference

Lewin, T. (2010, July 23). Once a leader, U.S. lags in college degrees. *The New York Times*, A11.