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'Zero to Five:' A scam to help teachers union

By: Examiner Editorial

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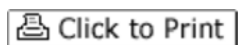
Next to universal health care, President Obama's top domestic goal is government financed pre-school for all three- and four-year-olds, regardless of family income. Obama promised his supporters at the National Education Association that he will spend billions on his "Zero to Five" early childhood education initiative, while assuring taxpayers of a \$10 return for every dollar spent on the program. But there is no evidence that expanding the time American children spend in state-run schools will produce any educational benefits at all. On the contrary, two states – Georgia and Oklahoma - that have been offering state-funded universal pre-school for more than a decade were among the 10 states that made the least progress on the 2006 National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP)– the only standardized exams administered nationwide.

Georgia spends more than \$325 million annually on its pre-school program, which serves more than half of all four-year-olds in the state. But a recent study by Georgia State University found that most of the program's academic gains are lost by the end of first grade. In fact, Georgia pre-kindergarten students were indistinguishable from students who did not attend pre-school at all, leaving nothing to show for the state's \$4,200 per pupil annual expenditure. The same lack of discernible progress was also found in Oklahoma, where more than 70 percent of four-year-olds are enrolled in state-funded preschool at a cost of \$7,400 per student. Fourth-grade NAEP reading scores actually declined in Oklahoma since universal pre-kindergarten began in 1998 - a negative bang for \$139 million in taxpayer bucks Oklahoma spends each year. Besides this well-documented "fade out" effect, Stanford University researchers reported a higher level of negative socialization among children who spend even short periods of time in highly structured pre-school settings – just what Obama is advocating for every pre-schooler in the nation.

"The solid evidence for the effectiveness of early intervention is limited to those conducted on disadvantaged populations," concludes University of Chicago Nobel laureate James Heckman. But the federal government already spends \$7 billion annually on its 40-year-old Head Start program for low-income children. There is no evidence that spending billions more on heavily subsidized pre-school for middle- and upper-income youngsters will provide any academic benefits at all. What "Zero to Five" is likely to do is drive small, privately-owned pre-schools out of business in order to create more jobs for NEA members – who will be the real beneficiaries of this latest educational scam.

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