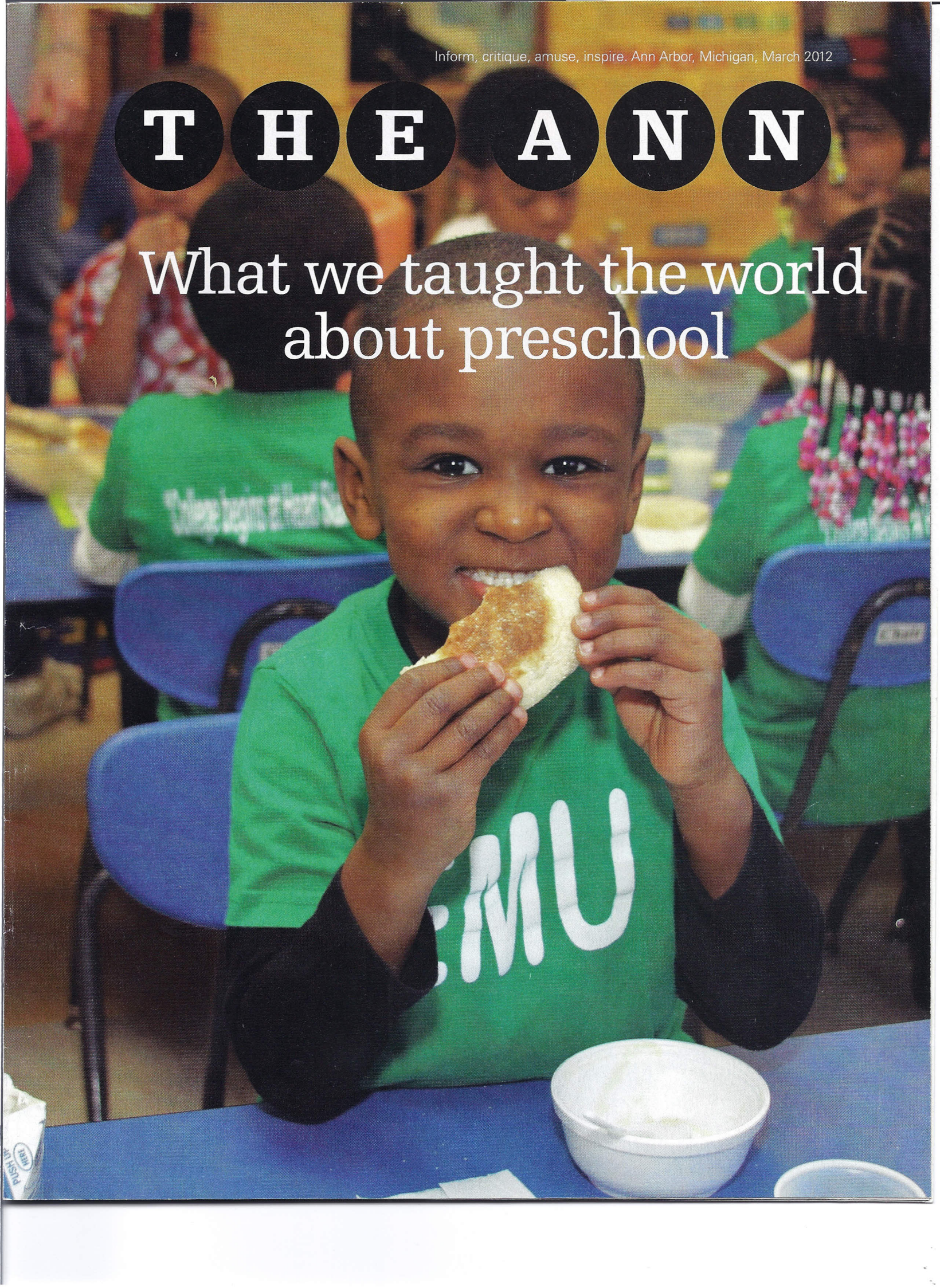


Inform, critique, amuse, inspire. Ann Arbor, Michigan, March 2012

T H E A N N

What we taught the world
about preschool



Uh-oh. The editor, Kyle Poplin, climbed way up on his high horse this month. Let him know your opinion on preschool education and budget woes by emailing theannmag@gmail.com, calling 369-4239 or visiting [Facebook.com/theannmag](https://www.facebook.com/theannmag) or theannweb.com.

It shouldn't be this difficult

You don't get to be a middle-aged journalist without building up some serious curmudgeonliness. And I'm speaking from experience here.

Too many news stories involve good people gone bad, wasted opportunities, glitz being honored over substance and worthwhile programs that turn into boondoggles.

Of course, every once in a while true heroes are discovered and the curmudgeonliness subsides, at least temporarily. Like the heroes I saw in action recently at Washtenaw County Head Start in Ypsilanti.

It was a thing of beauty, watching lead teacher Jenita Holbrook and her assistants Patti Milkey and Michelle Mortimer lead a class of 3-, 4- and 5-year-olds. This was serious hands-on educating, from supervising the children as they served themselves breakfast (try this at home if you think it's easy!) and brushed their teeth, to singing songs about the alphabet and reading quietly.

Experts always make things seem so effortless. Such was the case with Holbrook, Milkey and Mortimer. There was learning going on all around the room, but the children only knew they were having fun. There was no stress.

Such is not the case, of course, with Washtenaw County Head Start, the bureaucratic entity. Washtenaw County commissioners have decided not to administer Head Start next year, so there's an air of uncertainty around the program. The local Head Start will continue, for sure, but the details of who, what and when are up in the air.

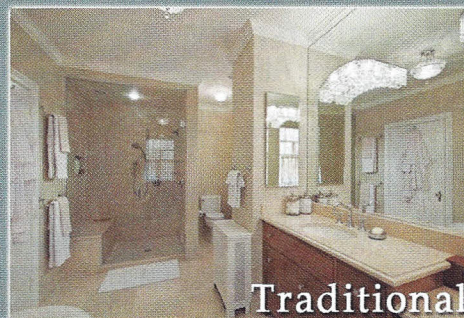
Those issues will be resolved in time. Less easy to fix will be the bewilderment of the teachers and staff who prove Head Start's worth every day, yet find their value ultimately boils down to line items in a budget.

Preschool education has a long and proud history in Washtenaw County, as Amy Whitesall lays out very well in her centerpiece story in this issue. We hope you'll read it and tell us what you think.



Rochman
DESIGN-BUILD

Select Your Style!



Traditional

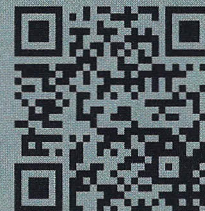


Modern



Arts & Crafts

Vote for your favorite style on our website poll:

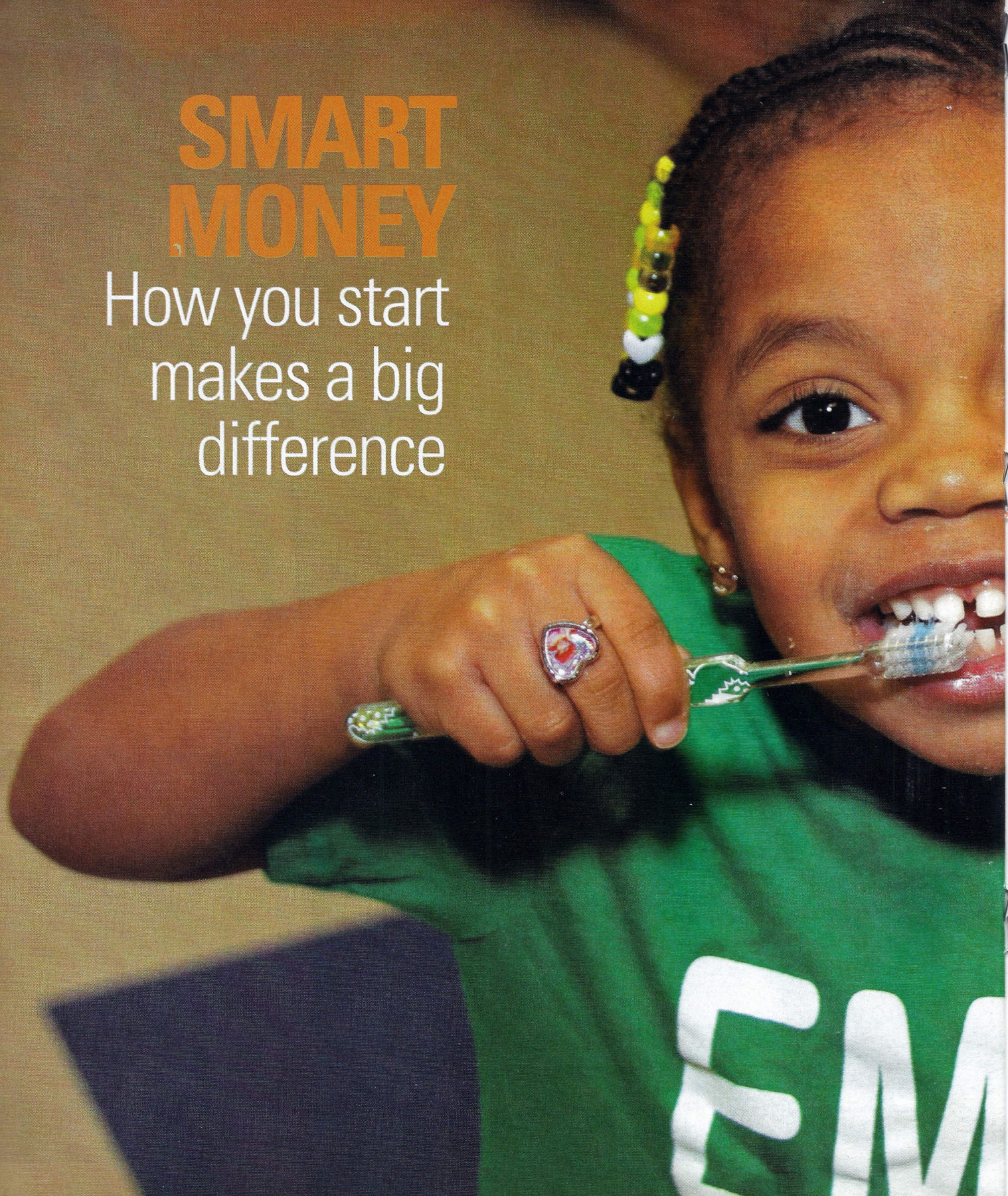


www.RochmanDesignBuild.com/Poll

Above is a QR code. Download a QR code reader from your mobile phone app store.

SMART MONEY

How you start
makes a big
difference





Briana Wesley demonstrates her tooth-brushing technique after finishing breakfast at the Ypsilanti Head Start class. Photo by Lynn Monson

50 years ago, a local study taught the world the value of a preschool education.

Today, Washtenaw Head Start is still trying to prove its worth.

BY AMY WHITESALL

On the ground floor of Eastern Michigan University's Mark Jefferson Science Complex, big boulders and slabs of stone litter the lobby like building blocks the Flintstones forgot to put away.

Though they look like regular rocks, to the visiting group of 4-year-olds from Washtenaw County Head Start, they're like magnets.

The kids climb on the rocks, sit on the rocks, push against them. (The rocks don't budge, even when a big person helps.) They touch the smooth ones and the bumpy ones and the crumbly ones.

"Do you have rocks like this in your yard?" the teacher asks. "Where do you think they came from? What do you think is inside the rocks?"

A geology professor explains that students who want to know what's inside the rocks come to college to learn that.

For many of these kids, college is a pretty abstract idea. For one thing, they're 4 years old.

But they also come from low-

income homes where, in many cases, no one has ever gone to college. Maybe no one at home talks about college, or no one has anything good to say about it.

"College is a must, anymore," said Head Start Program Service Manager Marilyn Gatewood. "We can't instill that in the minds of the children early enough."

The visit, part of a "College Begins at Head Start" program, makes college a real part of the children's world. But it also helps prepare them for life — building things like resilience ("It didn't move the first time; let's push this way.") and autonomy ("I'm on top of the rock!") that they'll need to be successful in school and as adults.

And you thought they were just rocks.

Fifty years ago, a group of teachers and researchers in Ypsilanti set out to see if a good preschool program could help poor kids succeed in school. Their experiment, the High-Scope Perry Preschool Study, helped

to launch the national Head Start program. But the study has gone way beyond its intended purpose, teaching more about the long-term benefits of early childhood education than its authors ever thought to ask.

Can preschool make people try harder? Can it reduce teen pregnancy? Fight crime? Reduce strain on the healthcare system?

Yes, yes, yes, and we'll see.

In an atmosphere of ever-shrinking budgets it may be tough to project those future benefits onto a 4-year-old. But today more than ever, the Perry study shows that providing low-income kids with good preschool may be the best investment money can buy.

WHY THE STUDY WAS UNIQUE

In the early 1960s, Ypsilanti public schools were segregated. All the African-American children in the district attended Perry Elementary, a school in the heart of the African-American community on the city's

south side.

It was a close-knit community that ran the gamut economically, from doctors and lawyers to factory workers to people on welfare.

Ypsilanti special education director David Weikart noticed that a disproportionate number of the district's African-American students were being placed in special ed or held back, and he wondered if he could help them do better in school by providing a good preschool program.

Perry Principal Charles Eugene Beatty paved the way. Beatty was an anchor in the community and his school was its hub, hosting everything from community meetings to wedding receptions to immunization clinics. The connections he'd forged set the stage for Weikart's experiment.

Weikart hired four teachers, all with master's degrees and special education and early childhood education certifications, and sent them out into the neighborhood to recruit families to be part of the study.

Because the study focused on the kids most at risk of failing in school, the research pool of 123 children was made up of kids who not only had low IQ scores, but also had other things working against them. They came from low-income households and in many cases were raised by single mothers. Their parents averaged a ninth grade education.

Roughly half (58) would go to preschool; the other half would stay home. To eliminate any bias in selecting the preschool group, a coin flip decided it.

"Back in the '60s this was truly an untested question," said Larry Schweinhart, president of the HighScope Foundation, which Weikart created in 1970 to continue the work begun at Perry Preschool. "There wasn't a strong sentiment that this is a good thing, or this is where kids need to

be, so people were willing to go along with the group assignments they received."

That random assignment – cavalier as it may seem today – is what has made the Perry Preschool study unique and powerful. It's one of the few preschool studies – and easily the longest-running one – that can claim with confidence "this led to that."

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

That first day the children arrived dressed in their Sunday best. There was a sense that they were "going to school," and this should be taken seriously. But the Perry teachers had other plans. Messy ones.

They built their lessons around the thing children do best – play. No worksheets, no memorization.

They cooked, painted, dug in the dirt, went on field trips. They played records and danced to B.B King, Ray Charles, The Beatles. They turned a liquid into a solid by making Jell-O.

Each teacher was responsible for five or six kids, and every week the teachers visited the children at home, showing the mothers how to support their child's education with puzzles and matching games, reading and real-life problem solving.

And they encouraged students to talk, something the kids weren't getting at home, where social norms still dictated that a "good" child was a quiet child. The teachers asked open-ended questions ("Where do you think the rocks came from?") and teased out responses, getting them to express opinions, make plans, tell stories.

"We built strong relationships with the families," former Perry Preschool teacher Louise Derman-Sparks said in a 2009 interview with American Radio Works. "Our message to families was: 'You have great kids, we're here to help you help them learn' ➔

COUNTY BOWS OUT OF HEAD START IN 2013

In November, the Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners approved a 2012-13 budget that includes \$528,048 for Head Start in 2012, but eliminates that funding beginning in 2013. Commissioners feel the county can no longer afford it.

That means the county will no longer administer Head Start – after 46 years of doing so – but it doesn't mean the program is going away.

Head Start is a federal program, and most of its \$4.8 million local budget comes through a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The federal government directs money to local Head Start "grantees" all over the country. In Washtenaw County, the county government has been the grantee. That's not commonly the case; most Head Start grantees in Michigan are community action agencies and school districts.

When the county drops its Head Start grant, Health and Human Services will start looking for a new local grantee, and will run the program in the interim.

HighScope Foundation President Larry Schweinhart says he doesn't know what led the majority of commissioners to decide that the county couldn't afford to run Head Start. But he does know the program helps kids who need it the most – not just now, but all their lives.

"Whatever judgment the county government made, we have a moral and an economic imperative to provide these children with these programs," he said.

Meanwhile, Washtenaw County Head Start Program Service Manager Marilyn Gatewood says the kids will continue to get the best preschool experience their teachers can give.



Photo by Chris Stranad

“College is a must, anymore. We can’t instill that in the minds of the children early enough.”

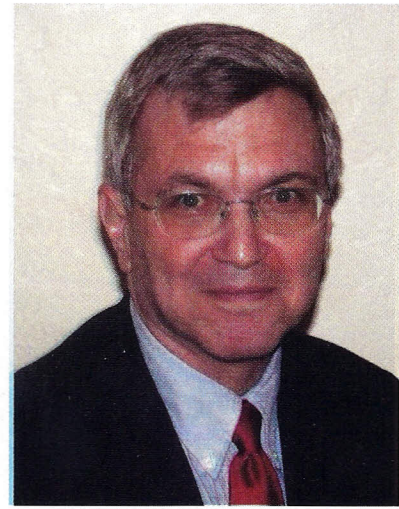
MARILYN GATEWOOD
HEAD START PROGRAM SERVICE
MANAGER



Photo by Chris Stranad

“Every day they’re going to come home and have learned something and have something exciting to share with their parents.”

MARTI BOMBYK
EASTERN MICHIGAN SOCIAL
WORK PROFESSOR



“A good preschool program is a full-time occupation.”

LARRY SCHWEINHART
PRESIDENT OF THE HIGHSOPE
FOUNDATION

➤ and help them succeed. We care about you, we care about your family being able to function as well as it can. We really want your kids to make it!

“And somehow in the two years (the children) were with us – where they were intellectually engaged and socio-emotionally supported and nurtured – they developed a sense of themselves as achievers.”

FIRST, IT WORKED. THEN IT DIDN'T.

In those days IQ scores were the coin of the educational realm. People believed that IQ was a fixed number, that whatever ability you had to be “smart” was baked in at birth. When kids were held back or tested into special education classes, people assumed they couldn’t be taught.

The children in the study started with IQs between 70 and 85 (100 being average). Weikert’s original goal was to see if preschool could raise the children’s IQ scores. At first, it did – an average of 10 points and in



Shareese Palmer dries her hands after washing before breakfast at Head Start. Photo by Lynn Monson

some cases as many as 22 points. It was a Big Deal.

The findings coincided with a growing national buzz about preschool and contributed to the 1965 launch of Project Head Start, the program President Lyndon B. Johnson promised would lift people out of poverty.

But by the time the Perry Preschool kids were 10, the test score differences had faded. (Other studies were showing the same thing with Head Start participants.) There were still some thin effects – fewer behavioral problems with kids who went to preschool, fewer held back or placed in special ed – but in many ways the experiment looked like a bust.

In 1975 Schweinhart was the new guy at HighScope, tasked with analyzing the latest batch of test scores from the Perry Preschool kids, who were then 14 years old.

“There was every reason to believe the effects of the program had kind of faded away by fourth grade,” said Schweinhart, who took over the foundation after Weikert’s death in 2003.

Head Start teacher Jenita Holbrook helps Carlton Coleman, left, and Ke'Ari Oliver use building blocks to construct make-believe buildings during a recent play-time session. Photo by Lynn Monson



"I saw the difference between the groups and figured there must be some mistake."

Forty-nine percent of the preschool group showed a basic level of achievement on the high school test they took at age 14, compared to 15 percent of the non-preschool group. And remember, all of these kids started out at equally high risk of failing in school.

Schweinhart thinks the difference showed up on that particular test because it was more difficult than most. The preschool group didn't ace the test – and their IQ scores were no higher than their peers – but they were more likely to at least finish the test.

They tried harder.

"As the degree of difficulty went up, the difference between the groups became more pronounced. It seemed to be strongly related to motivation," he said. "Then the next thing you ask is, 'How did it happen?' and I think we're continuing to figure out that question."

SKILL BEGETS SKILL

The Perry Preschool kids still grew up in poor households, often with single parents. The preschool experiment had not driven discrimination from their schools or from society. There was still a lot stacked against them.

But in high school the students who'd gone to preschool were more likely to consider school important. Their parents had better attitudes toward school, too.

And the more time passed the more the indirect effect piled up. More of the Perry Preschool kids would ultimately graduate. The girls, in particular, were far more likely to finish high school (84 percent vs. 32 percent), and had half as many teen pregnancies and fewer children out of wedlock.

In adulthood the preschool difference began to play out in other ways: More of the preschool participants had jobs, savings accounts, second

cars. More owned their home. At age 40, the preschool group earned more annually – \$20,800 vs. \$15,300 – and in some cases the difference was enough to lift their family above the poverty line. Men from the preschool group were also more involved in raising their children.

But one of the most striking effects may have been in crime prevention. At age 40, those who went to preschool were far less likely to have spent time in jail and less likely to have been involved in violent crime.

"It turned out (the Perry program) actually promoted social skills, promoted motivation," said Nobel Laureate James Heckman, a University of Chicago economist who's become one of the Perry Preschool project's most vocal proponents.

"These are non-cognitive skills, what we call 'soft skills,' that have to do with sociability, the ability to communicate and get along with others, the ability to have self control."

They were the very skills, Heckman noticed, that were missing in ➤

➔ people who washed out of the many unsuccessful job training programs he'd seen.

But where did those things come from?

He's come to the conclusion that early skills lay the foundation for future success – that skill begets skill, and motivation begets motivation.

Eastern Michigan social work professor Marti Bombyk has seen that phenomenon in her work with Head Start, but she calls it something different.

"At the risk of sounding ridiculous, it's the love," Bombyk said. "The child wants to come to school; they're excited to come to school; good things happen there. They get a healthy meal; they play; the adult-to-child ratio is small. They get the attention they need and it's all wrapped in encouragement and support. Every day they're going to come home and have learned something and have something exciting to share with their parents."

LONG-TERM INVESTMENT

The Perry Preschool study wasn't cheap. In today's dollars it cost roughly \$19,400 per child for two years of preschool – paid first by the Ypsilanti Schools and later by a grant from the U.S. Office of Education.

But a cost-benefit analysis – the thing that first caught Heckman's attention – seems to show that providing preschool to at-risk kids is a bargain.

Consider the cost of special education, the cost of keeping someone in the criminal justice system, the tax revenue the government gets from higher earnings and the money saved when fewer people need social services. Heckman ran the numbers and came up with a 7-10 percent annual rate of return on the investment in Perry Preschool.



Charles Eugene Beatty was principal of Perry Elementary in Ypsilanti when the HighScope study was commissioned in the 1960s. Photo by Chris Stranad

"What we see is that early childhood programs pay dividends for life," Heckman told a group of Chicago policy and business leaders in 2010. "We see savings as early as kindergarten in reduced burdens on the schools; we see savings in the teenage years; we see a direct link to higher adult productivity and self sufficiency."

And there's room for that rate of return to rise.

Today Heckman is the one driving the Perry study forward. He suspects motivation and self control may also play a role in health – particularly in avoiding preventable diseases linked to risk factors like obesity and smoking. The United States spends \$1.5 trillion a year on medical costs associated with chronic diseases, including diabetes, heart disease and cancer. Heckman hopes to collect health data from Perry participants at age 50

and see where it leads.

CLOSING THE GAP

Perry Preschool was not Head Start, and Head Start is not Perry Preschool. One was a small, five-year study, the other a national program that serves nearly 1 million kids.

Perry was more stringent about teacher qualifications, but gave those teachers more leeway in the classroom. It supported families, but was always more focused on teaching. It had a small student-to-teacher ratio, and its teachers were well-paid, areas where Head Start has had to compromise.

"A good preschool program is a full-time occupation," Schweinhart said.

What Perry Preschool, Head Start and state-run school readiness programs like the state of Michigan's Great Start program share is a recognition that while early childhood education is good for any kid, it's critical for poor kids.

Without it, the achievement gap starts when that child arrives at kindergarten grows like a weed. It doesn't take long to become insurmountable, because just as skill begets skill, failure begets failure.

"I had an educator tell me once that he could look at all the kids in his school and tell me which ones would go to jail," Bombyk said. "He had already written them off. Early childhood education writes them on."

Head Start begins at 3, and sometimes these days Gatewood thinks even that's not soon enough. When a family struggles, even the little kids feel the pressure.

She taught preschool for 34 years before becoming an administrator. She's taught the children of her own former students, a bittersweet reminder that sometimes it takes more than one generation to climb out of poverty. But she also has colleagues

who came through Head Start themselves – whose path to college really did begin at Head Start.

“It’s about showing them that those opportunities exist for you,” Gatewood said. “You can be anyone and anything you want to be. It has nothing to do with where you come from. It all has to do with where you want to go.”



A'Nyia Wells finishes her breakfast, one of the first activities of the day at Head Start. Photo by Lynn Monson



CAMP CORNER



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

ANN ARBOR YMCA
400 W. Washington St.
(734) 996-9622

CHOOSE YOUR ADVENTURE

**Summer Day Camps
ANN ARBOR YMCA**

Discover all that the Y has to offer this summer for kids and teens ages 5-16. Financial assistance available.
www.annarborymca.org



Summer Day Camp!



**Half Day
Ages 5-7**

**Full Day
Ages 5-7 & 7-10**

Registration is Now Open!
Call for more information (734) 665-3735 ext. 57
www.libertyathletic.net



the discovery center
Summer Camp Programs (ages 2½ - 5 yrs.)
Adventure Summer Program
(Kindergarten & 1st Grade)
&
Summer Explorers' Camp - Preschool
Your child will enjoy weekly themes such as "Experimenting With Science" and field trips to local farm markets & other community resources





734.663.7496
775 S. Maple Rd.
Ann Arbor

www.thediscoverycenterpreschool.com