

Report links workers' reliability to preschool attendance

By **BRENDA LANGE**

Special for Lehigh Valley Business

It stands to reason that, at least in some professions, the most successful employees have the highest level of education.

It may surprise some to discover that in many cases, the most desirable employees have received the highest-quality preschool education.

Over several decades, through various studies and anecdotal evidence, it has been shown that the type of education a child receives before entering kindergarten gauges how well he or she will fare in

the workplace later in life.

On the surface, the connection seems clear. A quality preschool education increases a child's chances of succeeding in later schooling and in life. They are more likely to graduate from high school, less likely to become involved in criminal activities and are more likely to find a good job and earn more income.

Other studies, including several reported in a 2015 New York Times article, say that any gains made in pre-K programs

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THE CONNECTION FROM TODDLER TO EMPLOYEE

- **Children exposed** to preschool are better in noncognitive abilities such as self-control, persistence and grit – traits that remain for a lifetime.
- **Perseverance, dependability** and consistency are the most important predictors of grades in school.
- **Dependability and empathy** are traits most valued by employers.

SOURCES: The Perry Preschool Experiment, human resources professionals and "Investing in Our Young People" by Flavio Cunha (University of Pennsylvania) and James Heckman (University of Chicago)



ILLUSTRATION/TRILINGSTUDIO

GOODBYE CUBICLE, HELLO WORKBENCH

Offices, furniture designed to create collaboration, lure millennials

NOW TRENDING ...

- Workbenches.
- Workstations.
- Low panels dividing workstations and carrels.
- Adjustable desks.
- Storage cabinets underneath or above desks.
- Couches and chairs in conversation spots.
- Glass-enclosed offices, "huddle rooms" and conference rooms.
- Smaller work spaces.
- Modular furniture that can be reconfigured.
- Open floor plans.
- Natural light.
- White or gray tones accentuated by pops of color.

By **WENDY SOLOMON**
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Isolating cube farms are starting to disappear from the American office and they are being replaced by long benches and workstations where employees can see – and often hear – each other over low panels.

The modern office also may be furnished with comfy couches and soft chairs where employees can relax, converse with colleagues or work on laptops in nooks and enclaves.

And it's all taking place in an open floor plan.

These and other trends in office design and furniture have been showing up across the Greater Lehigh Valley, with some of the more modern elements showing up in startups and tech companies.



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please see **WORKBENCH**, page 10

One office design trend: Informal seating areas furnished with couches and chairs.



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disappear or even out by the third grade. The difference, according to the article by David L. Kirp, is the quality of the education, and, of course, the amount of money spent on the program.

LANDMARK STUDY

A seminal study in the mid-1960s involved 123 low-income, African-American children. Half received a quality preschool education and the control group received none.

By the time the children reached age 40, the differences were dramatic, according to a 2010 article in *Wired* citing the Perry Preschool Experiment.

“Adults assigned to the preschool program were 20 percent more likely to have graduated from high school and 19 percent less likely to have been arrested more than five times. They got much better grades, were more likely to remain married and were less dependent on welfare programs,” Jonah Lehrer wrote.

The study also showed that the adults who had been well-educated as 3- and 4-year olds didn’t maintain higher IQ scores. Instead, their education improved “performance on a variety of noncognitive abilities, such as self-control, persistence and grit.”

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL SKILLS

Area businesspeople and human resource professionals agreed.

“Developing positive social-emotional

skills affect one’s success in the workplace, where daily interactions with others are unavoidable,” said Don Bernhard, retired director of community affairs at PPL Corp. and now the executive director of Downtown Allentown Community Development Initiative.



“There is compelling evidence that these high-quality, early childhood education programs help develop these skills and that they last for a lifetime. They are highly relevant to people who are hiring.”

— Don Bernhard, advocate for early childhood education

He also has been a member of the board of Community Services for Allentown for 22 years, where he serves on the Governor’s Early Learning Commission, which advocates for and engages other businesses to provide more funding for early childhood education.

“There is a cost-effectiveness to investing in early childhood education,” he said, “especially for children growing up in poverty and suffering the stress that goes along with that. There are studies that show that stress reactions of dealing with everyday life affects their learning.”

LAST FOR A LIFETIME

Bernhard conceded that quality programs for the youngest students are not cheap, but, he added, “compare that to what it costs to get someone back on track

later in life.”

Through such education, 3- and 4-year-olds learn how to manage emotions and solve problems, develop flexibility, communication skills, teamwork, perseverance and empathy – a checklist of what it takes to make a good employee.

“There is compelling evidence that these high-quality, early childhood education programs help develop these skills and that they last for a lifetime,” Bernhard said. “They are highly relevant to people who are hiring.”

The Allentown Community Development Initiative coordinates the efforts of many larger companies in Allentown that want to ensure the new-found prosperity in the city’s business sector carries over into the surrounding areas.

EMPATHY TOPS THE LIST

Jon Conrad, vice president of human resources at Moravian College in Bethlehem, cited one quality that makes an overall desirable employee: empathy.

“An employee who is empathetic is a better employee than someone who

only thinks about their own wellbeing,” Conrad said. “That’s just one trait, along with discipline and compassion, that is learned early by children who have good examples.”

He added that employers who exhibit the culture of positive emotional-social skills will often attract employees who fit into that culture.

“Such a supportive environment allows parent-employees to be more supportive of their children,” which creates a matching environment, Conrad said.

TEAM PLAYERS

Of course, a hiring manager has no way of knowing if an applicant was taught in a Head Start program, for example, which not only helps youngsters develop coping skills and personal and social development among other traits, but also measures results.

HR professionals are, however, well-versed in the STAR interview technique, which stands for “situation, task, action, result.” Interview questions are phrased to elicit information about a prospective employee’s character traits that tie back to social-emotional skills children learn when young.

Bernard agreed. A company’s success most often hinges not on “rock-star” employees, but rather on the development of a group of team players who know how to collaborate.

“Developing empathy, ethics, how to be a decent human being is easier when young, just like learning languages,” he said.

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