



Behavioral Insights and Parenting Lab

Show Up 2 Grow Up: Boosting Attendance in Head Start

THE CHALLENGE

In Chicago, 36 percent of students in Head Start programs miss more than 10 percent of school—more than a month of instructional time.

High levels of absenteeism are common in subsidized preschool programs. This startling trend continues over the course of the child's education: one-third of chronically absent four-year-olds continue to be chronically absent in kindergarten. Of these students, more than 30 percent are still chronically absent in second grade.

Absenteeism is a problem for preschool children because they miss crucial time to develop kindergarten readiness skills. Behavioral science has shown that individuals often encounter cognitive “roadblocks” that prevent them from engaging in behavior that they themselves want to do. Head Start programs stress the importance of attendance, and low-income children are less often absent from kindergarten than from preschool. This suggests that one or more cognitive “roadblocks” may reduce attendance in the preschool years.

THE STUDY

Funded by the Joyce Foundation, this randomized controlled trial aims to develop a cost-effective and scalable behavioral approach to understanding and reducing absenteeism in Head Start programs.

Show Up 2 Grow Up implements a series of text messages, approximately four to six per week, that:

- Emphasize the importance of preschool learning concepts for kindergarten readiness
- Prompt parents to identify obstacles to attendance and create plans to address these obstacles
- Provide information to parents about their children's monthly attendance rates
- Remind parents to maintain a goal of daily attendance

We have created a platform for parents to maintain a monthly goal of 100 percent attendance for their child. The intervention provides objective feedback for parents on their success in meeting these goals.

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WHO WE ARE

The Behavioral Insights and Parenting Lab at the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy studies the parental investments that promote children's success and how behavioral tools can leverage these investments to increase their return. Research shows that a variety of low-cost, light-touch "behavioral tools" can successfully change behavior in a number of key arenas of life, including health and financial savings behavior. Part of the Center for Human Potential and Public Policy at Harris, the BIP Lab is dedicated to experimental research to investigate whether these approaches can make a difference in parenting strategies to promote children's development in low-income families. The BIP Lab was founded in 2014 by Harris professors Ariel Kalil and Susan E. Mayer.

DIRECTORS

Ariel Kalil, PhD, is a professor at Harris Public Policy, where she also directs the Center for Human Potential and Public Policy. She is a developmental psychologist who studies economic conditions, parenting, and child development. In addition to her work at the BIP Lab, her current research examines the historical evolution of income-based gaps in parenting behavior and children's cognitive and non-cognitive skills.

Susan E. Mayer, PhD, is a professor and dean emeritus at Harris Public Policy. She has published numerous articles on the measurement of poverty, the effect of growing up in poor neighborhoods, and the effect of parental income on children's well-being. In addition to her work at the BIP Lab, she is engaged in a number of studies of intergenerational economic mobility.



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