

**The Chicago Longitudinal Study:
A Study of Children in the Chicago Public Schools¹**

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The Chicago Longitudinal Study (CLS; Reynolds, 1991, 1999; Reynolds, Bezruczko, Hagemann, 1997) investigates the educational and social development of a same-age cohort of 1,539 low-income, minority children (93% African American) who grew up in high-poverty neighborhoods in central-city Chicago and attended government-funded kindergarten programs in the Chicago Public Schools in 1985-1986. Children were at risk of poor outcomes because they face social-environmental disadvantages including neighborhood poverty, family low-income status, and other economic and educational hardships. The increasing prevalence of children at risk of school failure continues to concern educators, researchers, and policy makers alike (McLoyd, 1998; National Center for Children in Poverty, 1997; Weissberg & Greenberg, 1998). Because children represent our human potential, the growing presence of children at risk due to poverty and associated factors may severely limit their future success.

Study Goals

The CLS is guided by four major goals:

1. To document patterns of school performance and social competence throughout the school-age years, including their school achievement and attitudes, academic progress, and psychosocial development.
2. To evaluate the effects of the Child-Parent Center and Expansion Program on child and youth development. Children and families had the opportunity to participate in this unique Head Start-type early childhood intervention from ages 3 to 9 (preschool to third grade).
3. To identify and better understand the educational and psychosocial pathways through which the effects of early childhood experiences are manifested, and more generally, through which scholastic and behavioral development proceeds.
4. To investigate the contributions to children's educational and social development of a variety of personal, family, school, and community factors, especially those that can be altered by program

¹Portions of this paper are adapted from the introduction to the special issue of the Journal of School Psychology (Reynolds, 1999).

or policy interventions to prevent learning difficulties and promote positive outcomes.

Studies addressing the first two goals have been reported extensively. Participation in the Child-Parent Center Program for different lengths of time, for example, has been found to be significantly associated with higher levels of school achievement into adolescence, with higher levels of consumer skills, with enhanced parent involvement in children's education, and with lower rates of grade retention and special education, lower rates of early school dropout, and with lower rates of delinquent behavior (Reynolds, 1994, 1995, 2000; Reynolds & Temple, 1995, 1998; Temple, Reynolds, & Miedel, in press). Children's patterns of school and social adjustment over time (Reynolds & Bezruczko, 1993; Reynolds & Gill, 1994; Reynolds, 2000) as well as several methodological contributions (Reynolds & Temple, 1995; Reynolds, 1998a, 1998b) also have been reported elsewhere. Examples of studies addressing goals 3 and 4 are reported in a special issue of the *Journal of School Psychology* (Reynolds, 1999).

The Chicago Longitudinal Study is particularly appropriate for addressing these and other goals for two major reasons. First, the CLS is one of the most extensive and comprehensive studies ever undertaken of an low-income, urban sample. Data were collected beginning during children's preschool years and have continued on a yearly basis throughout the school-age years. Multiple sources of data have been utilized in this on-going study, including teacher surveys, child surveys and interviews, parent surveys and interviews, school administrative records, standardized tests, and classroom observations. Thus, the impact of a variety of individual, family, and school-related factors can be investigated. I am aware of no other longitudinal studies of this size and scope, especially for minority children growing up in the central city.

A second unique feature of the CLS is that although the project concerns child development, an emphasis is given to factors and experiences that are alterable by program or policy intervention both within and outside of schools. Besides information on early childhood intervention, information has been collected on classroom adjustment, parent involvement and parenting practices, grade retention and special education placement, school mobility, educational expectations of children, teachers, and parents, and on the school learning environment. Indeed, each is an underinvestigated topic in urban education.

Sample Characteristics

The original sample included all 1,150 children who attended or received services from the 20 Child-Parent Centers in kindergarten in 1985-1986. Another 389 children of the same age participated in an alternative all-day kindergarten program in 5 randomly selected Chicago public schools serving low-income children. Study children were born in 1980. As a consequence of living in school neighborhoods eligible for Title I funding, all children in this cohort were eligible for and participated in government-funded early childhood programs. CLS children in kindergarten attended schools, for example, in which 67% of students in the attendance area were from low-income families, compared to 42% for all students in the Chicago public schools.

As shown in Figure 1, children grew up and attended schools in the highest poverty neighborhoods in Chicago. Of the 77 official community areas in Chicago, study children in kindergarten attended 25 schools representing 17 community areas. Many of these schools were concentrated in most disadvantaged community areas, including North Lawndale, East and West Garfield Park, Woodlawn, and Grand Boulevard.

Insert Figure 1 and Table 1 here

Selected sample characteristics of the original and age 14 follow-up samples are displayed in Table 1. The sample is evenly split between boys and girls, about 3 in 5 parents reported they graduated from high school, and over 90% of the children were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. About two-thirds participated in the Child-Parent Center program during preschool. The study sample's expected date of high school graduation was 1998 or 1999 (if retained in grade).

The Social Context of Urban Education

The social context surrounding urban schools in high-poverty settings like Chicago presents

adversities to children and families than can impair positive development and limit the impact of positive early experiences such as those provided in early childhood interventions. Wilson (1996) describes these all too common adversities as follows:

children of the inner-city ghetto have to contend with public schools plagued by unimaginative curricula, overcrowded classrooms, inadequate plant and facilities, and only a small proportion of teachers who have confidence in their students and expect them to learn. Inner-city ghetto children also grow up in neighborhoods with devastating rates of joblessness, which trigger a whole series of other problems that are not conducive to healthy child development or intellectual growth. Included among these are broken families, antisocial behavior, social networks that do not extend beyond the confines of the ghetto environment, and a lack of informal social control over the behavior and activities of children and adults in the neighborhood. (pp. xv-xvi).

Viewed from a larger historical perspective, the stark social and economic conditions of inner-city environments in Chicago emanate from community transformations that began at least three decades ago. The Chicago Fact Book Consortium (1995) described some of these economic and institutional changes for the North Lawndale community area on the west side--one of the major neighborhoods in which children and families from the CLS have lived--as follows:

The newest residents of North Lawndale encountered a series of community catastrophes after 1960, which resulted in a stagnated economy and a deteriorating social fabric. First were the riots which came after the King assassination in 1968, during which substantial parts of the Roosevelt Road shopping strip were destroyed by fire. After that storeowners moved when insurance companies either canceled their policies or prohibitively increased their premiums. Another severe blow fell when the International Harvester Company's tractor works closed in 1969, with the loss of an estimated 3,400 jobs.

The riots, coupled with the racial turnover in North Lawndale between 1950 and 1970, purportedly resulted in the loss of 75% of its business establishments and 25% of its jobs. The department store and other retail facilities burned out or closed on Roosevelt Road were never replaced.During the 1970s, 80% of the area manufacturing jobs disappeared, as Zenith and Sunbeam.... electronics factories shut down, and a Copenhagen snuff plant was closed. The closing of an Alden's catalogue store was a signal event in a sequence that wiped out 44% of the retail and service jobs in North Lawndale. The downturn continued through the 1980s when Western Electric started closing down, to disappear completely by 1985 (p. 107).

It was within contexts such as this that the Child-Parent Center (CPC) Program began in 1967 in four west side sites. The Child-Parent Center (CPC) Program is a center-based early intervention that provides comprehensive educational and family-support services to economically disadvantaged children from preschool to third grade. The program was established through funding from Title I of the landmark Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. It is the second oldest (after Head Start)

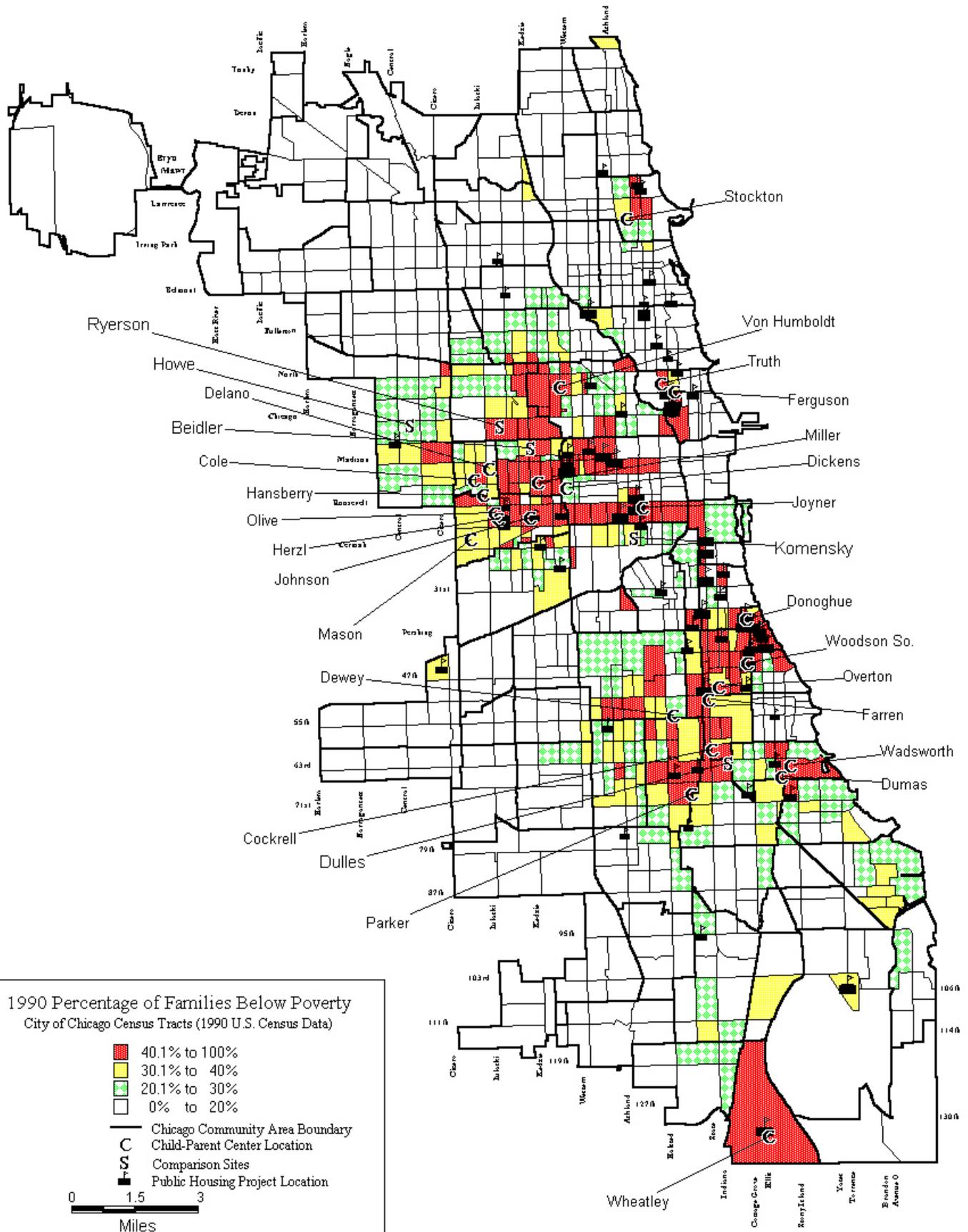
federally funded preschool program in the U. S. and is the oldest extended early childhood intervention. The program is designed to promote children's academic success and to facilitate parent involvement in children's education. See Reynolds (2000) for further information on the history of the program and on the Chicago Longitudinal Study. In summary, the Chicago Longitudinal Study was designed to provide policy-relevant knowledge that can be used to help meet the educational needs of children in urban and other settings.

Table 1

Selected Characteristics of the Original Sample
and the Follow Up Sample at Ages 14

Sample characteristic	Original sample	Age 14 sample
Number of children	1,539	1,164
CPC preschool	989	772
No CPC preschool	550	392
Percent sample recovery	100	75.6
Percent CPC preschool	64.3	66.3
Percent African American	92.9	93.7
Percent Girls	50.2	51.8
Percent from neighborhoods > 60% low income	76.0	76.1
Percent from families with high school degree or more	57.7	57.5
Percent eligible for free lunch from ages 8 to 12	83.7	83.7
Mean age at K entry in 1985	63.4	63.4
Mean word analysis score in K	63.8	63.8

Neighborhood Context in the Chicago Longitudinal Study



Boundary Source: Chicago Board of Education

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