

Kindergarten attention span predicts good work habits down the road: research

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Vinay Menon

Staff reporter



RICK EGLINTON/TORONTO STAR
Highfield Junior School Kindergarten students take a 4-week prep course to get ready for school.

Kindergarten students with poor attention spans are less likely to develop strong workplace skills compared to peers, a new study has found.

“For children, the classroom is the workplace, and this is why productive, task-oriented behaviour in that context later translates to the labour market,” said lead researcher Linda Pagani, a professor at the [University of Montreal](#) and CHU Sainte-Justine.

The study started in 1997 when teachers first rated 1,369 kindergarten students on how well they worked autonomously and with classmates. The students, all from low-income areas in Montreal, were also assessed for self-control, self-confidence, as well as their ability to follow directions and complete assignments on time.

The children were then tracked through Grade 6. Three natural groupings emerged: those with high, medium, and low classroom engagement. The kids who fell into the latter group in kindergarten were more likely to remain disengaged all the way through.

In the past, researchers have found that kindergarten characteristics predict whether you’re going to finish high school or not, said Pagani. “In fact, these characteristics will also predict what kind of employment earnings you’re going to have.”

In studying childhood development, Pagani says “attention skills” have traditionally been overshadowed by “cognitive skills.” But that is now changing.

“It’s not just achievement that we want for kids,” she said. “We don’t subsidize public education just for having smart people turn out later on. We also want people who can become part of the workforce.”

The study was published this month in the [Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology](#).