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Maureen Kelleher covered Chicago's public schools for over a decade. Now a contributing writer to *Education Week*, she examines early childhood education through two lenses: newshound and mom of a one-year-old.

Maureen Kelleher

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Illinois Preschoolers Make Academic, Social Gains, Says Study

By [Maureen Kelleher](#) on May 6, 2011 2:37 PM | [No comments](#) | [No recommendations](#)

A new [study](#) of Illinois' preschool programs shows that by kindergarten, [Tweet](#) preschool participants had made statistically significant gains in language and social skills. They also showed a reduction in problem behaviors. However, children enrolled in Illinois pre-K did not show gains in mathematics.

The study was funded by the Illinois State Board of Education and conducted by the Erikson Institute in conjunction with SRI International. The researchers assessed 684 children from preschool programs around the state, with the exception of Chicago. (The Chicago Public Schools conducts its own evaluation of its pre-K program.)

Advocates are seizing on the results both to preserve Illinois pre-K from budget cuts and to promote the creation of a statewide, research-based kindergarten assessment called KIDS, for Kindergarten Individual Development Survey. In early 2010, the Illinois State Board of Education created a Kindergarten Readiness Stakeholder Group to develop [recommendations](#) for a school-readiness assessment to be given to kindergartners statewide.

Proponents say KIDS will help identify gaps in school readiness, guide classroom instruction, and provide information to schools, districts and the state to support decision-making about resource allocations. They cite Maryland and Colorado as states where similar data systems are already in place.

"By gathering a clear picture of what Illinois children know and what they can do as they enter school, we can more effectively create the integrated learning system our children need to be successful in school and life," said Diana Rauner, President of the Ounce of Prevention Fund, and one of the group's co-chairs.

The group recommended piloting KIDS during the 2012-13 school year and left it to the state to determine the specific assessment instrument to be used. "Rather than relying on a one-time snapshot, we look forward to developing an assessment system that uses multiple measures," said State Superintendent of Education Christopher A. Koch. "This type of data will support parents and educators as children enter kindergarten and create a strong foundation for growth."

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