

**LADDERS OF LEARNING:  
Fighting Fade-Out by Advancing PK-3 Alignment  
Kristie Kauerz, January 2006**

**Overview**

An increasing body of evidence shows the positive impact of high quality pre-kindergarten in helping students succeed. However, the bad news is that these effects often tend to fade out over time as students move through grades 1, 2, and 3. This paper outlines the importance of having a strong, well aligned program beginning in PreK and extending through third grade (PK-3). PK-3 alignment suggests that PreK experiences should be aligned with kindergarten and that kindergarten should be aligned with early elementary education.

**Main Points**

- I. There are several things to consider when making efforts to fight fade out:
  1. We should not assume that there is a single magic bullet solution to raising student achievement.
  2. The availability of high quality PreK programs to *all* children is critical to fighting fade out.
  3. It is important to consider the quality of elementary schools.
- II. Alignment is a central element of PreK-3 and has been shown to be a crucial factor for improving the quality of education. Alignment is an ongoing and comprehensive endeavor that has both *structural elements* (the policies and regulations) and *process features* (what children actually experience in classrooms). It can work *horizontally*, as the child experiences a single grade level, *vertically* as the child moves up through grade levels, or *temporally* as children learn and develop throughout the calendar year.
- III. Recommendations for federal action:
  - a. Alignment at the national level: Convene a national PreK-3 commission. This commission could examine current PreK-3 standards and establish national guidelines for ready school and for PreK-3 standards, curriculum and assessments.
  - b. Alignment at the state level: Support the creation of state PreK-16 councils
  - c. Alignment at the local level: Dedicate new Title I No Child Left Behind funds to PreK-3 efforts

**Conclusion**

PreK-3 is a promising approach for reducing fade-out and enabling children to expand upon the gains they make in PreK. Devoting federal attention and funding to horizontal, vertical and temporal alignment along the PreK-3 continuum will not only raise this nation's consciousness about the necessity of improving both early childhood and elementary education but will provide crucial leadership for states and local school districts to expand their own efforts in PreK-3.

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