

toolkit

For Early Learning Advocates

Welcome to the Strong Start for Children Campaign Advocacy Toolkit

This toolkit provides the resources advocates and community leaders need to make sure early learning stays on the national policy agenda and the recent Preschool Proposal becomes a reality. To check out all of the Strong Start for Children campaign materials, visit our website: www.nwlc.org/strongstart.



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ABOUT THE CAMPAIGN

The Strong Start for Children - Building America's Future Campaign is an ever-expanding, diverse effort of national, state, and local groups united in support of increased federal early childhood investments and the President's Preschool Proposal, which would expand access to high-quality early learning opportunities for low-and moderate-income children and families. The Campaign has three goals: increase public awareness about the importance of the early years to a child's success in school and in life, build support among public officials for greater investments in early learning, and expand the voices of support for young children and their families.

We'd like to thank the following for their contributions to this Toolkit:

Mary Beth Testa at the Early Care and Education Consortium

Marsha Dumka at the Early Childhood Development Initiative in New York

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Betty Holcomb at the Center for Children's Initiatives in New York

Denise Tanata Ashby at the Children's Advocacy Alliance in Nevada

Monica Bandy at the Alliance for Children and Families

ZERO TO THREE – The National Center for Infants, Toddlers, and Families

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Welcome to the Strong Start for Children Campaign Advocacy Toolkit!

EARLY LEARNING IS ONE OF THE BEST INVESTMENTS WE CAN MAKE. High-quality early care and education helps give children the boost they need to succeed in school, provides parents with the support and peace of mind they need to be productive at work, and strengthens our economy in the short- and long-term. These benefits have garnered support for early care and education investments from across the political spectrum, as evidenced by a recent bipartisan poll.

We encourage local, state, and national organizations to become part of the campaign.



**SIGN UP
TO BE A
CAMPAIGN
PARTNER**



And check out the list of organizations already involved at www.nwlc.org/campaignpartner.

If you would like any assistance with your early learning outreach, including connecting with local organizations, please email Amy Qualliotine at aqualliotine@nwlc.org or Melanie Ross Levin at mrosslevin@nwlc.org, or call 202-588-5180.

Proposed New Federal Investment in Early Learning

IN APRIL, PRESIDENT OBAMA PUT FORTH A RECENT PRESCHOOL PROPOSAL IN HIS FISCAL YEAR 2014 BUDGET TO EXPAND ACCESS TO EARLY LEARNING. IT INCLUDES:

Preschool for All: The President proposes to invest \$75 billion over 10 years in an initiative to expand access to high-quality preschool, starting with four-year-olds in low- and moderate-income (up to 200% of the federal poverty level) families.

Voluntary Home Visiting: The budget proposes \$15 billion over 10 years for voluntary home visiting programs to support vulnerable families with young children. Home visiting programs offer parent education and connect parents with resources that help them promote their children's health, well-being, learning, and development.

Early Head Start—Child Care Partnerships: The proposed budget includes \$1.4 billion in FY 2014 to expand high-quality early learning opportunities for infants and toddlers through new Early Head Start—Child Care Partnerships. This initiative would serve 110,000 infants and toddlers, thereby nearly doubling enrollment in Early Head Start.

Head Start: The budget proposes a \$222 million increase for Head Start to fund a cost of living increase (1.9 %) for grantees and continued implementation of the designation renewal system, which is the system that requires low-performing grantees to compete to continue receiving funding.

Child Care: The Child Care and Development Block Grant would receive an additional \$500 million in mandatory funding (an additional \$7.3 billion over 10 years) to maintain low-income families' access to child care assistance and an additional \$200 million in discretionary funding for a new child care quality initiative.

Financing the Plan: Preschool and home visiting would be paid for by increasing the federal cigarette tax by 94 cents per pack.

This toolkit provides helpful resources advocates and community leaders can use to advance this proposal. For all of the Strong Start for Children campaign materials, visit our website: www.nwlc.org/strongstart.

Traditional Advocacy

IT IS CRUCIAL THAT WE WORK TOGETHER TO MAKE THE PRESCHOOL PROPOSAL A REALITY. There are countless ways to engage your network in early learning advocacy efforts. Advocacy strategies are not one-size-fits-all; make sure you choose strategies that you know will be successful with your particular network.

Come together for early learning! Here are some traditional advocacy ideas to get you started:



1. Set Up an In-District Meeting

Find out when your Member of Congress will be at home in your district. Reach out to the district office to set up a meeting

with your Senators and Representative. Use this time to show why the Preschool Proposal is so important for your community. Bring local data about gaps in preschool participation, infant and toddler care, or other relevant issues specific to your area.

How-to:

- ✓ Visit www.senate.gov and www.house.gov to identify your Members of Congress
- ✓ Locate the nearest district office by visiting your Member's official website
- ✓ Reach your Member of Congress by calling the Capitol Switchboard at **202-224-3121**



TIPS...

...FOR MEETING WITH YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS

1. **Do Your Homework:** Research both sides of the issue and be familiar with the opposition's arguments. Make sure you're familiar with any recent developments.
2. **Personalize the Issue:** Sharing a story about how the issue affects real children, families, and friends is an effective way to get through to your legislator.
3. **Present Your Case:** Have a clear idea of what you hope to accomplish through this meeting and be specific about what you'd like your Member of Congress to do.
4. **Leave a Fact Sheet:** Give your legislator information summarizing the issue to look over.
5. **Follow Up:** Send a thank-you note, provide additional materials, and continue to keep in touch with your Member of Congress as new developments take place.



2. Engage Key Stakeholders

Gather together individuals who understand why investment in high-quality early education is so important. Hold a press event, have them sign a letter, or set up a visit with them and a key policymaker.

- Mission: Readiness *hosts events which bring together retired generals and admirals who show support for state-federal early childhood investments as a matter of national security. They recently released a new report on prekindergarten and national security. More here: www.missionreadiness.org/2013/earlychildhood.*
- For the 2013 Early Learning Day of Action, the New York Early Childhood Development Initiative (ECDI) Coalition put together a very successful event. They invited Congresswoman Louise Slaughter, Mayor Thomas Richards of Rochester, the local Head Start CEO, and the CEO of Rochester Childfirst to speak at a local high-quality center. Each individual spoke about a different aspect of high-quality early learning. The ECDI coalition provided the press with packets that included a background sheet on the Coalition's work, a press release with a quote from each participant, the [Strong Start for Children Campaign's Principles](#), and a fact sheet on the Preschool Proposal. The event helped to garner local press and can easily be replicated in other areas.



3. Arrange a Visit

Arrange for an elected official to visit a local high-quality preschool classroom or child care center. Show the official how beneficial the program is to enrolled children, and make the case for expanding access to high-quality early learning opportunities.

Tips:

- ✓ Check the Congressional calendar to see when your Members of Congress are on recess in their home district.
- ✓ Select a site with a diverse group of children and enthusiastic directors.
- ✓ Ensure your legislator has the chance to interact with children.

For the 2013 Early Learning Day of Action, advocates invited Congressman Rush Holt to visit a high-quality preschool program in Trenton, New Jersey. There, he made the connection between the need for more classrooms like the one he was visiting and the Preschool Proposal.

For more: www.nj.com/mercer/index.ssf/2013/05/rush_holt_visits_trenton_devel.html.



4. Do an Advocacy Drop

Gather letters, crafts, artwork, or signatures on a petition expressing support for the Preschool Proposal to deliver to your Representative's and/or Senators' offices. Consider bringing children and families to make the drop personal for the staff members receiving the items.

After the President announced his plan to expand preschool in his budget, the Strong Start for Children campaign collected thank-you notes from children, teachers, parents, and advocates across the country. Members of the campaign delivered more than 30,000 thank-you letters and pieces of artwork to the White House as a strong show of grassroots support. A drop like this can be replicated on a smaller scale for a delivery to a local policymaker.



Children's artwork is delivered to the White House. Photo by Jeff Martin, www.photosbyjeffrey.com



5. Collect Signatures

Write a letter of support for the Preschool Proposal and collect signatures. Signers can be organizations or individuals. Make a plan to deliver the sign-on letter to a key policymaker.



6. Attend Town Hall Meetings

Gather a group of people whose lives will be positively affected by the Preschool Proposal and attend a meeting in your district. Be sure to express your support for the Proposal and come prepared with questions about early learning for your legislator.



7. Plan a Rally

Bring people together in a public space to raise the profile of early learning. Try to feature an interesting speaker to draw a crowd. Don't forget to invite the press!

- *To protest sequester cuts, the National Head Start Association organized a stroll-in to district offices of Members of Congress. Thousands of Head Start supporters and their children went to offices with their strollers and told their elected officials how devastating cuts to Head Start would be to their families and the local economy. These stroll-ins received a lot of press attention, amplifying their message. For more details, visit: www.nhsa.org/2013_strollin_to_stop_sequestration.*



8. Organize a Call-In Day

Ask members of your network to call key policymakers (usually Members of Congress) on the same day to deliver messages of support for the Preschool Proposal.

Tell your supporters to:

- Call the Capitol Switchboard at **(202) 224-3121**.
- Ask to speak with one of their Senators or their Representative.

- When they get someone on the phone, say:
"Hi my name is _____ and I'm a constituent. I would like to urge Senator/Representative _____ to expand investments in high-quality early learning opportunities for young children by supporting the Proposal to expand access to high-quality preschool."



9. Use Your Newsletter

If you have an existing newsletter or other method of communication with your network, use it to share information about the Preschool Proposal and upcoming advocacy events.



10. Place an Op-Ed or Letter to the Editor

Find influential individuals who are supportive of the Preschool Proposal to author an opinion piece or letter to the editor for a local, regional, or national news outlet. Use state and local data when possible. (See the Advocacy Resources section for samples and tips.)



11. Get on the Agenda

Find out when local groups such as the *Kiwanis, Rotary, Lions clubs, Chamber of Commerce, Parent Teacher Associations*, and other organizations are meeting. Reach out to them to be put on the agenda for their next meeting to rally support for the Proposal.

**ADVOCATES HAVE ORGANIZED SUCCESSFUL EVENTS ACROSS THE COUNTRY—
 GET INSPIRED BY SOME OF THEIR CREATIVE IDEAS!**



MEDIA TIPS

- Invite members of the local and regional press to any advocacy events you are planning.
- Send out a press release featuring quotes from the speakers during or immediately after any events you host.



12. Work with Education Leaders

Join with other stakeholders such as superintendents, school principals, teacher unions, K-12 advocacy groups, kindergarten teachers, and others to organize joint events or co-author op-eds to promote the value of high-quality preschool.



13. Collect Stories

Work with early elementary school, prekindergarten, Head Start, and child care teachers, as well as home visitors to collect stories about the impact of high-quality early learning programs on young children. Send them to the Strong Start for Children campaign at www.nwlc.org/prek and share with your members of Congress.

Online Advocacy

MORE AND MORE ADVOCACY IS TAKING PLACE ONLINE.

The Internet allows for easy collaboration and dialogue among advocates, stakeholders, and policymakers.

Not sure where to start? Let us help!

1. Facebook

This social media site is great for spreading the word about events, publicizing the facts on early learning, and sharing resources.

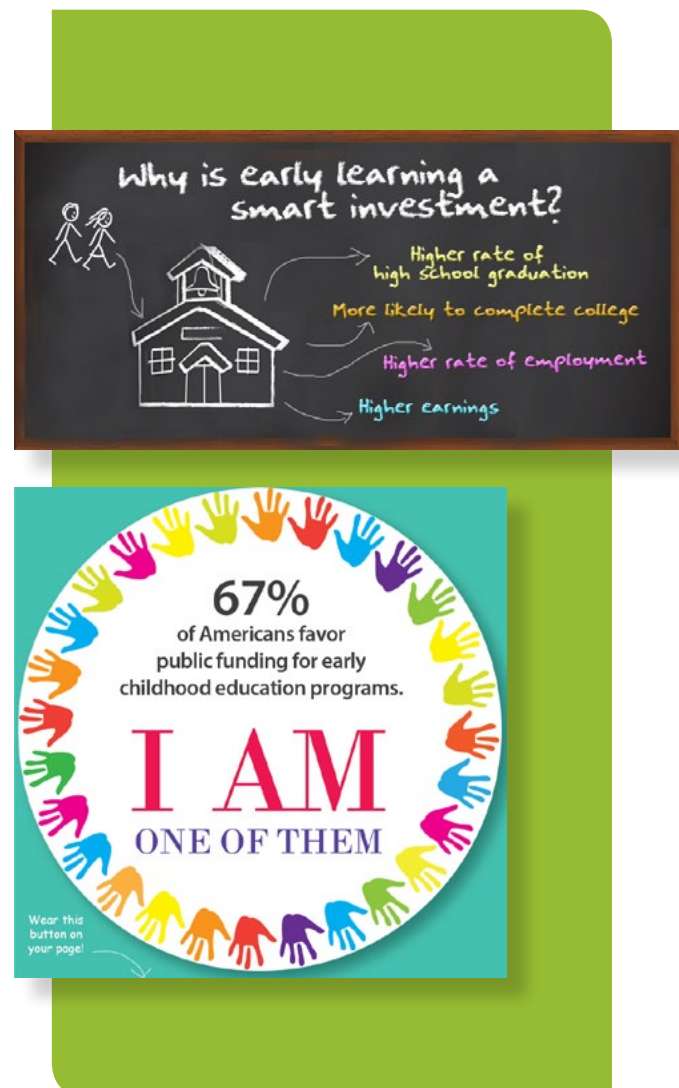
- Posting graphics on Facebook can communicate a simple message to a broad audience and make the case for early learning. Post these graphics on your page and encourage your friends to share!
- The *National Women's Law Center* routinely posts about early learning and encourages others to share the content it creates on their own pages. Check out NWLC's Facebook page: www.facebook.com/nwlc.

2. Twitter

Use this social media site to create and continue conversations about early learning. Individuals and organizations tweeting about the Preschool Proposal are using the hashtag #PreKForAll to talk about the importance of high-quality early learning experiences.

- **Commonly used early learning hashtags:**

#PreKForAll
#ece
#earlyed



- **Host a “Tweetchat”**

On the 2013 Early Learning Day of Action, advocates, educators, parents, and policymakers took to Twitter to discuss the Preschool Proposal on the hashtag #PreKForAll. The chat trended nationally, meaning that early learning was a “hot topic” across the social media platform. The chat encouraged conversation about the importance of high-quality early learning opportunities, and raised the profile of the issue across America by placing the #PreKForAll hashtag in more than 40 million unique Twitter users’ feeds.



3. Blog Carnival

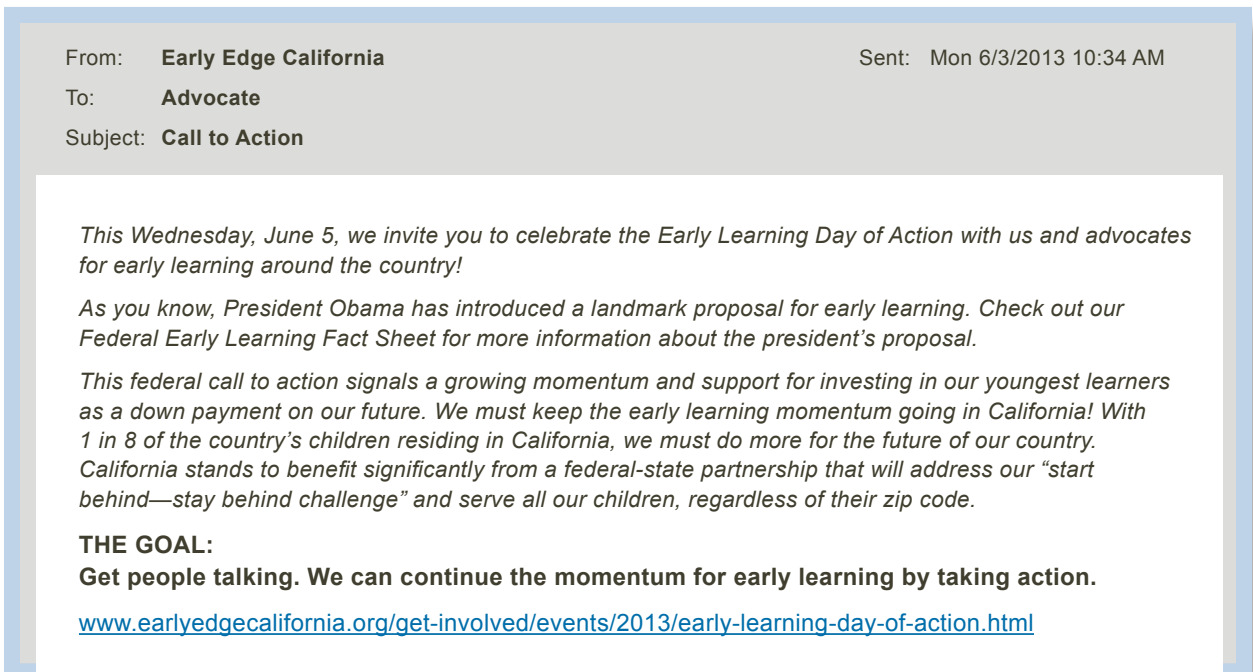
Invite key stakeholders to blog about the Preschool Proposal on the same day and host all of the posts on a common page. This strategy can attract press attention as well as show strong support from a particular community.

On the 2013 Early Learning Day of Action, NWLC collected blog posts from members of the Strong Start for Children campaign, and assembled an array of posts on the importance of preschool. Posts from the blog carnival can be found here: www.nwlc.org/our-blog/blog-early-learning-day-action-2013-%E2%80%93-posts.

4. Grassroots Messages

Use an email blast system to get information to your network and generate messages to policymakers. Similar to a call-in day, organize a week or day of action for your network to send emails to the relevant policymakers. Alternatively, you can use your online system to collect signatures for a sign-on letter or petition that you can arrange to deliver to a policymaker’s office.

Early Edge California sent out the following eblast to supporters on Monday, June 3 in advance of the 2013 Early Learning Day of Action:



5. Virtual Meeting

Organize an online event to raise awareness about the importance of early learning and engage people who may not necessarily be “plugged in” to advocacy or are located far from locations where in-person events are typically held. Virtual meetings can take the form of a webinar or a Google Plus Hangout.

On July 8th, ZERO TO THREE hosted a Virtual Baby Rally where celebrities, including Soledad O'Brien and Jennifer Garner, national policy leaders, including Kathleen Sebelius and Arne Duncan, and advocates came together to support early learning for babies and toddlers. For more information visit www.rally4babies.org.

Advocacy Tools

PRESCHOOL PROPOSAL TALKING POINTS

- The research is clear – the first years of a child's life are critical for his or her development. Children who have a high-quality preschool experience are more likely to do well in school and find better jobs as adults. They are also less likely to commit crimes or need public assistance later in life.
- The earliest years of life lay the foundation for children's learning and growth. Yet affordable, high-quality infant care is hard to find—or non-existent—in many communities across the country.
- Too many children are left behind before they even start kindergarten. Without the chance for a high-quality early education experience, hundreds of thousands of children come to kindergarten behind their peers.
- Children don't get a do-over when it comes to their early childhood. High-quality early education is one of the best investments we can make in their futures and ours as a country, and we only get one chance to make it right for each child.
- All parents deserve the chance to send their children to a high-quality preschool program.
- Parents should have access to high-quality preschool for their children no matter the size of their paychecks.
- The earlier that education starts, the greater the gains. But most working parents can't afford high-quality preschool for their children. Fewer than three in ten four-year-olds are currently enrolled in high-quality preschool.
- Making sure children get a high-quality preschool experience is a smart investment that pays off for all of us. That's why Republican and Democratic governors around the country are making early childhood a priority in their states. It's time to make high-quality preschool for every child a national priority.
- Babies are born learning. Learning in very young children takes place through play, the active exploration of their environment, and, most importantly, through interactions with the significant adults in their lives.
- Children learn best when they are healthy physically, socially, and emotionally. We can help ensure the good health of infants, toddlers, and their families by expanding access to Early Head Start and voluntary home visiting programs.

- Neuroscience confirms that the early years establish the foundation on which later development is built. The emergence of basic skills and competencies is directly linked to the later development of more complicated skills and competencies.
- Increasing the federal tobacco tax, as is proposed for funding this Preschool Proposal, would deliver significant health benefits to lower-income people, who are more likely than high-income people to smoke less, quit, or never start in response to a tax increase. This ensures healthier parents for low-income children.
- A tobacco tax increase would also help older children. Economic research has found that every 10 percent increase in the price of cigarettes reduces youth smoking by six or seven percent and overall cigarette consumption by three to five percent.
- Early childhood education is a top priority for voters. When presented with the broad outlines of a federal plan that helps states provide better early childhood education programs to low- and middle-income families without increasing the debt, fully seven-in-ten voice their support – with strong majorities of support among Republicans (60%), Independents (64%), and Democrats (84%).
- Voters believe parents need help with early childhood development, and government can provide it.
 - 89% say it is important to make early education and child care more affordable for working families to give children a strong start.
 - 86% want the federal government to help states and local communities build better preschool services and make them accessible to children from low- and middle-income families.

For more information on the recent poll showing strong support for the Proposal, visit www.growamericastronger.org. To learn more about working with business leaders, law enforcement, retired military leaders, and religious leaders, visit www.readynation.org and www.councilforstrongamerica.org.

SAMPLE OP-EDS



TIPS FOR OP-ED PLACEMENT

- **Be brief and to the point**—A good rule of thumb is no more than 750 words.
- **Make it unique and beware of exclusivity clauses**—Many newspapers will not publish your piece if it has already been published somewhere else.
- **Give it a strong start and finish**—It is good to make your point early on and make your endings strong.
- **The specific is terrific**—Tell personal details and anecdotes from your experience to make your piece more compelling.
- **Avoid jargon**—Remember this is meant for a general audience.

SAMPLE OP-EDS

[NWLC: Sample Op-Ed with Infant-Toddler Focus](#)

[NWLC: Sample Op-Ed with Preschool Focus](#)

[Grow America Stronger: Sample Op-Eds](#) (*will be updated with additional content on a biweekly basis*)

[Zero to Three: How to Write an LTE and Op-Ed](#)

[Children's Defense Fund: Sample Op-Ed](#)

HOW TO USE THESE OP-EDS

Make it your own! Here are some suggestions that could make your op-ed more powerful by giving it a more local connection.

- Mention a local high-quality early learning program.
- Use a local news hook (e.g. home visiting program start-up, Head Start graduation, field trip taken by a program, high-profile visit to a program).
- Include state or local-specific facts (use your own and see below for other sources).
- Use a title that has local relevance.

THIS OPINION PIECE WAS PLACED IN THE LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL:

www.reviewjournal.com/opinion/investment-prekindergarten-investment-future

SAMPLE LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



TIPS FOR LETTER TO THE EDITOR PLACEMENT

- **Try to keep it short**—A good rule of thumb is no more than 150 words.
- **Respond to something** in the paper that has been written in the past seven days.
- **State your point at the start.**

SAMPLE LETTERS TO THE EDITOR:

[NWLC: Sample LTE](#)

[Grow America Stronger: Sample LTE](#) *(will be updated with additional content on a biweekly basis)*

[Zero to Three: How to Write an LTE and Op-Ed](#)

HOW TO USE THESE LETTERS TO THE EDITOR:

- Make it your own!
- Add in state-specific facts (use your own and see below for other sources).
- Do not feel limited by the approach or scope of these LTEs. Try to keep the length the same—but you can strategically add or subtract details.

Further Information About Early Learning

INFANTS AND TODDLERS FACTS AND STUDIES

Background information on infants, toddlers, and school readiness:

[Putting Infants and Toddlers on the Path to School Readiness: A Policy Agenda for the Administration and 113th Congress](#)

[Making the Case for a Comprehensive Infant and Toddler Policy Agenda](#)

Research on the importance of a child's earliest years:

[Young Children Develop in an Environment of Relationships](#)

Get the facts about infants and toddlers in your state:

[State Baby Facts](#)

Infographic outlining a child's path to school-readiness:

[The School Ready Child](#)

PREKINDERGARTEN FACTS AND STUDIES

Research demonstrating the short- and long-term effects of high-quality preschool:

[The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study Through Age 40](#)

[Age 21 Cost-Benefit Analysis of the Title I Chicago Child-Parent Center Program Executive Summary](#)

[Abbott Preschool Program Longitudinal Effects Study: Fifth Grade Follow-Up](#)

[Getting the Facts Right on Pre-K and the President's Pre-K Proposal](#)

Preschool enrollment data:

[Current Population Survey October 2011 – Detailed tables](#)

Get the facts about prekindergarten in your state:

[The State of Preschool 2012](#)

HOME VISITING FACTS AND STUDIES

Background information on home visiting:

[Zero to Three: Home Visiting](#)

[Pew's Home Visiting Campaign](#)

Get the facts about the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting program in your state:

[Home Visiting Grants & Grantees](#)

BACKGROUND DATA ON CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Basic facts about low-income children:

[National Center for Children in Poverty: Child Poverty](#)

Data on poverty in the U.S. by age and race:

[Current Population Survey: Poverty](#)

International data on child poverty:

[Measuring child poverty](#)

Employment characteristics of families:

[Employment characteristics of families](#)

ABOUT THE CENTER

The National Women's Law Center is a nonprofit organization that has been working since 1972 to advance and protect women's legal rights. NWLC focuses on major policy areas of importance to women and their families, including family economic security, employment, education and health and reproductive rights, with special attention given to the needs of low income women.

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