

CHILD CARE

FACT SHEET

High-Quality Prekindergarten Is a Wise Investment

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Early education helps prepare children to succeed in school and in life. Numerous studies show that children enrolled in high-quality early education programs go on to perform better on cognitive tests in elementary and secondary school, are more likely to graduate from high school, go to college, be employed, and be in good health, and are less likely to become involved with crime or turn to welfare. Yet, many children—particularly the low-income children who stand to benefit the most—lack access to early education. Some support for prekindergarten is provided through federal and state programs, but these programs fall short of meeting the need.

A number of studies have demonstrated the many short- and long-term benefits of high-quality early education.

- The Perry Preschool Study—a longitudinal study involving 123 low-income three- and four-year-olds, about half of whom were randomly assigned to a high-quality preschool and about half who were randomly assigned to a control group that did not participate in the preschool program—found that the preschool program had multiple significant benefits that extended into adulthood.¹
 - Preschool participants significantly outperformed the control group on cognitive and language tests from their preschool years up to age seven and on school achievement tests at ages nine, ten, and fourteen.
 - Preschool participants had significantly better attitudes toward school than those in the control group at ages fifteen and nineteen.
 - Preschool participants were more likely to graduate from high school than the those in the control group (77 percent versus 60 percent).
 - Preschool participants were more likely to be employed at age forty than those in the control group (76 percent versus 62 percent).
 - Preschool participants had higher median annual earnings at age forty than those in the control group (\$20,800 versus \$15,300).
 - Preschool participants had significantly fewer arrests as of age forty than those in the control group (36 percent versus 55 percent had been arrested five or more times).
 - Overall, the economic return to society of the Perry Preschool program was \$16.14 per dollar invested (including \$12.90 per dollar invested that went to the general public and \$3.24 per dollar invested that went to the participants).
- The Abecedarian Study—a study that followed 101 at-risk children, about half of whom were randomly assigned to an intensive early intervention program and about half of whom were randomly assigned to a control group, through age thirty—found long-lasting benefits of the program.²
 - Program participants were more likely to have graduated from a four-year college or university than those in the control group (23 percent versus 6 percent).

- Program participants were more likely to have been consistently employed than those in the control group (75 percent of participants had worked full time for at least sixteen of the previous twenty-four months versus 53 percent of the control group).
- Program participants were less likely to have used public assistance than those in the control group (4 percent of participants received benefits for at least 10 percent of the previous seven years versus 20 percent of the control group).
- The Chicago Longitudinal Study—a quasi-experimental study that compared 989 children who completed preschool and kindergarten in the Child-Parent Centers operated by Chicago Public Schools and 550 children in similar neighborhoods who did not attend the preschool program but did participate in a full-day kindergarten program—identified several positive impacts of the preschool program for participants through age twenty-one.³
 - Preschool participants had a 29 percent higher rate of high school completion than the comparison group.
 - Preschool participants had a 33 percent lower rate of juvenile arrest and a 42 percent lower rate of arrest for a violent offense than the comparison group.
 - Preschool participants had a 41 reduction in special education placement and a 40 percent reduction in grade retention relative to the comparison group.
 - Overall, the economic return to society of the program was \$7.10 dollars for every dollar invested in preschool (including \$3.83 per dollar invested that went to the general public and \$3.27 per dollar invested that went to participants).
- A study found that children who attended New Jersey’s Abbott prekindergarten program—a high-quality program established in urban, low-income districts as a remedy in the New Jersey Supreme Court school funding case, *Abbott v. Burke*—outperformed their peers in language, literacy, and math through second grade. Children who attended prekindergarten for two years had even greater advantages than children who attend prekindergarten for only one year. In addition, children who attended prekindergarten were less likely to be held back a grade—by second grade, the grade retention rate was 10.7 percent for children who did not attend prekindergarten, 7.2 percent for those who attended for one year, and 5.3 percent for those who attended for two years.⁴

Many children lack access to high-quality early education.

- Only 50 percent of three- and four-year-olds (not yet in kindergarten) are enrolled in public or private preschool programs. Low- and moderate- income children are less likely to be enrolled than higher-income children. The proportion of three- and four-year-olds (not yet in kindergarten) enrolled in preschool is:
 - 43 percent for those with family incomes under \$20,000;
 - 45 percent for those with family incomes from \$20,000 to \$29,999;
 - 42 percent for those with family incomes from \$30,000 to \$39,999;
 - 48 percent for those with family incomes from \$40,000 to \$49,999;
 - 50 percent for those with family incomes from \$50,000 to \$74,999; and
 - 65 percent for those with family incomes of \$75,000 and over.⁵
- A national study found that only about one-third (35 percent) of four-year-olds in center-based programs were receiving high-quality child care.⁶

The federal Head Start program and state prekindergarten initiatives offer early education opportunities, but there are still major gaps in the availability of high-quality programs.

- The federal Head Start/Early Head Start program received \$7.97 billion in funding and served 962,120 children in FY 2012.⁷ The program provides comprehensive early education, health, nutrition, and other support services to at-risk infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. It also works with families and offers opportunities for parent education and engagement. Head Start, which was established in 1965, still only reaches only about two-fifths of eligible preschool-age children.⁸ Early Head Start, which was established in 1994 to serve our youngest children, reaches less than 4 percent of eligible infants and toddlers.⁹
- Thirty-nine states funded prekindergarten programs in 2010-2011, spending a total of over \$5.49 billion and serving more than 1.3 million children, according to the National Institute of Early Education Research (NIEER).¹⁰ Most states allow prekindergarten to be provided in a range of settings, including schools, child care centers, Head Start, and other community-based settings. States generally target their programs to low-income children and/or children who have other background factors that place them at risk, with only a few states providing the funding and defining the eligibility criteria to make their programs universally available to all children whose families want them to participate. Although many states make a substantial investment in prekindergarten, there is still room to expand and strengthen these programs:
 - Total state funding for prekindergarten decreased by almost \$60 million and funding per child decreased by \$145 in 2010-2011 compared to the previous year, after adjusting for inflation.¹¹
 - Most states serve only a fraction of four-year-olds, and an even smaller proportion of three-year-olds. Nationwide, only 28 percent of four-year-olds are served by state prekindergarten programs (32 percent including special education prekindergarten) and just 4 percent of three-year-olds are served by state prekindergarten programs (8 percent including special education prekindergarten).¹²
 - Eleven states do not fund any prekindergarten program.¹³
 - Only six states' prekindergarten programs¹⁴ have quality standards that meet all ten of NIEER's benchmarks.¹⁵
 - State-funded prekindergarten programs generally operate on part-day, part-year schedules that do not meet the needs of parents working full time.

The United States lags behind other countries in access to early education.

- The percentage of three- and four-year-olds in the United States enrolled in preschool is lower than twenty-four out of thirty-four OECD countries.¹⁶

- 1 Lawrence J. Schweinhart, Jeanne Montie, Zongping Xiang, W. Steven Barnett, Clive R. Belfield, and Milagros Nores, The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study Through Age 40: Summary, Conclusions, and Frequently Asked Questions (High/Scope Press, 2005), available at http://www.highscope.org/file/Research/Perry-Project/specialsummary_rev2011_02_2.pdf.
- 2 Frances A. Campbell, Elizabeth P. Pungello, Margaret Burchinal, Kirsten Kainz, Yi Pan, Barbara H. Wasik, Oscar A. Barbarin, Joseph J. Sparling, and Craig T. Ramey, "Adult outcomes as a function of an early childhood educational program: An Abecedarian Project follow-up," *Developmental Psychology*, 48 (4), July 2012, 1033-1043.
- 3 Arthur J. Reynolds, Judy A. Temple, Dylan L. Robertson, and Emily A. Mann, Age 21 Cost-Benefit Analysis of the Title I Chicago Child-Parent Center Program: Executive Summary (2001), available at <http://www.waisman.wisc.edu/cls/cbaexecsum4.html>.
- 4 Ellen Frede, Kwanghee Jung, W. Steven Barnett, and Alexandra Figueras, The APPLES Blossom: Abbott Preschool Program Longitudinal Effects Study (APPLES) Preliminary Results through 2nd Grade Interim Report (Washington, DC: National Institute for Early Education Research, 2009), available at http://nieer.org/pdf/apples_second_grade_results.pdf.
- 5 National Women's Law Center calculations based on data from U.S. Census Bureau, School Enrollment in the United States: October 2011, Detailed Table 3. Nursery and primary school enrollment of people 3 to 6 years old, by control of school, attendance status, age, race, Hispanic origin, mother's labor force status and education, and family income: October 2011, available at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/school/data/cps/2011/tables.html>.
- 6 U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics: 2011, Table 57. Percentage distribution of quality rating of child care arrangements of children at about 4 years of age, by type of arrangement and selected child and family characteristics: 2005-06, available at http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d11/tables/dt11_057.asp. (Table prepared in December 2010 based on data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Birth Cohort.)
- 7 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Fiscal Year 2013 Administration for Children and Families Justification of Estimates for Appropriations Committees (2012), 102-103, available at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/assets/CFS%20final.pdf>.
- 8 National Women's Law Center calculations based on data on Head Start enrollment from Fiscal Year 2013 Administration for Children and Families Justification of Estimates for Appropriations Committees, 103; and data on the number of three- and four-year-old children in poverty from U.S. Census Bureau, Detailed Poverty Tables, POV34: Single Year of Age – Poverty Status: 2011, available at http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/cpstables/032012/pov/POV34_100.htm.
- 9 National Women's Law Center calculations based on data on Early Head Start enrollment from Fiscal Year 2013 Administration for Children and Families Justification of Estimates for Appropriations Committees, 103; and data on the number of children under age three in poverty from U.S. Census Bureau, Detailed Poverty Tables, POV34: Single Year of Age – Poverty Status: 2011.
- 10 W. Steven Barnett, Megan E. Carolan, Jen Fitzgerald, and James H. Squires, The State of Preschool 2011: State Preschool Yearbook (New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research, 2011), 6, available at <http://nieer.org/yearbook>.
- 11 The State of Preschool 2011, 5.
- 12 The State of Preschool 2011, 8.
- 13 The State of Preschool 2011, 5.
- 14 These six states include Louisiana, which funds multiple prekindergarten programs, only one of which meets all ten quality benchmarks.
- 15 The State of Preschool 2011, 10. The benchmarks are: comprehensive early learning standards; teachers with Bachelor's degrees; teachers with specialized training in early education; assistant teachers with Child Development Associate or equivalent credentials; at least 15 hours per year of in-service training for teachers; maximum class size of 20 children; staff-child ratios of 1 to 10 or better; vision, hearing, health screenings and referrals and at least one support service; at least one meal per day; and site visits for monitoring.
- 16 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Education at a Glance 2012: OECD Indicators, Chapter C - Access to Education, Participation and Progression (2012), available at <http://www.oecd.org/edu/educationataglance2012oecdindicators-chaptercaccessstoeducationparticipationandprogression-indicators.htm>.