

Early Childhood Education

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SEF Position

Expand access to affordable high-quality early childhood activities and Pre-Kindergarten programs.

Background

Groundbreaking work of the Abecedarian Project in North Carolina, initiated in 1972, found that students who had access to early childhood education programs have stronger learning gains throughout their school years. In 2017, a consortium of the nation's most prominent early education researchers was brought together to examine the state of Pre-K-related research. Overall, the researchers concluded that research broadly supports Pre-K as a beneficial intervention for students, particularly for those students who are dual language learners or who come from disadvantaged backgrounds.¹ State superintendents also universally recognize the lifelong impact of the early years. According to the Education Commission of the States, Democratic and Republican governors and legislators across all 50 states collectively approved of a \$256 million increase in Pre-K funding in 2018.²



Pre-K is a beneficial intervention for students, particularly for those who are dual language learners or who come from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Benefits of Early Childhood Education

- Investing in comprehensive birth-to-five early childhood education programs increases student achievement and saves tax payers money by minimizing government costs for adults who received quality early educational experiences.
- Children who participate in Pre-K programs are less likely to become teen parents, more likely to be employed, less likely to be enrolled in public assistance programs, and more likely to enter and complete college than their peers without a Pre-K experience.
- High-quality preschool and birth-to-five programs for children from historically marginalized communities can deliver between 7-13% per year return on investment.³

A Lasting Impact

More likely to be
EMPLOYED

More likely to **COMPLETE**
COLLEGE

High quality Pre-K programs
deliver 7-13% ROI

Less likely to become **TEEN**
PARENTS

Less likely to be **ENROLLED IN**
PUBLIC ASSISTANCE programs



SEF Recommendations

- Increase state funding to support the development of high-quality early childhood and pre-kindergarten programs.
- Utilize federal funding, such as through ESSA, to better coordinate education services for low-income young children.
- States and districts should offer a program day that provides adequate, productive learning time and activities, and child assessments used for individualized learning.⁴
- Ensure early childhood education professionals' salaries and employee benefits are the same as starting school district teachers.
- Provide culturally competent family engagement opportunities that support and engage families of all students.

End Notes

1. The Current State of Scientific Knowledge on Pre-Kindergarten Effects. Washington, DC: The Heckman Equation, 2016. https://heckmanequation.org/assets/2017/01/F_Heckman_CBAOnePager_120516.pdf.
2. Trends in Pre-K Education Funding in 2017-18. Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States, 2019. <https://www.ecs.org/wp-content/uploads/Trends-in-Pre-K-Education-Funding-in-2017-18.pdf>.
3. There's more to gain by taking a comprehensive approach to early childhood development. Washington, DC: The Heckman Equation, 2016. https://heckmanequation.org/assets/2017/01/F_Heckman_CBAOnePager_120516.pdf.
4. Evidence of Preschool Effectiveness: Insights for Policymakers. Washington, DC: Learning Policy Institute, 2018. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org>.