

MANY HAPPY RETURNS

Investing in high-quality,
pre-kindergarten education
yields benefits for kids,
schools, and communities.



The Center *for*
Public Education



**MANY
HAPPY
RETURNS**



**FOR MOST CHILDREN, TURNING 5 YEARS OLD MEANS TAKING THAT FIRST
BIG STEP INTO KINDERGARTEN.**

How can we ensure they will be ready for success when they arrive?

All children can benefit from a high-quality pre-kindergarten program. And for many of them, pre-k can make the difference between struggling through school or doing well in the elementary grades and beyond.

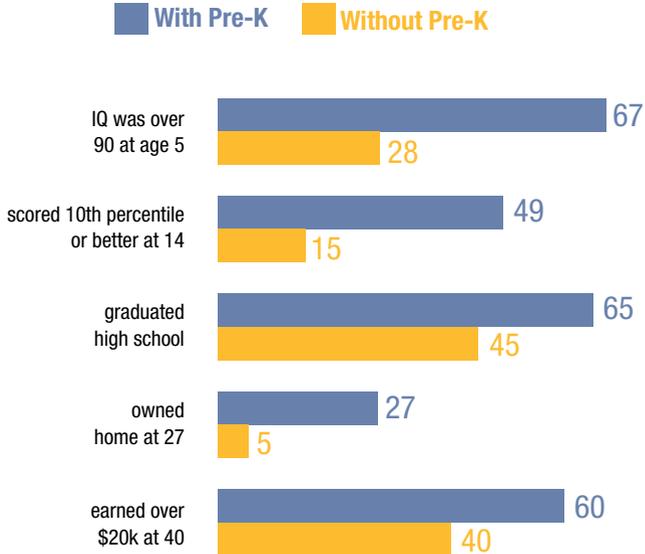
Indeed, making high-quality pre-k available to all families is an investment that pays for itself many times over.

Children who participate in pre-k programs are far less likely to need costly instructional services down the road and far more likely to succeed in school, both academically and socially, all the way to graduation.

And it's not only children who benefit. By investing in high-quality early education programs for families who choose to participate, states and communities can realize significant returns for years to come.



Pre-K is the gift that keeps on giving: The benefits of high-quality pre-k extend into adulthood.



FIGURES SHOWN IN PERCENT OF INDIVIDUALS

Source: *The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study through Age 40, Summary, Conclusion, and Frequently Asked Questions, November 2004*

Still Relevant: A Small-Scale Model from the Past

The High/Scope Perry Preschool project is frequently cited as a model early childhood program that demonstrates the positive effects of high-quality pre-k on the future lives of young children. This 1960s program provided 123 low-income African American children with a comprehensive, high-quality pre-k program that offered well-trained and well-compensated teachers and low staff-child ratios. High/Scope remains relevant today because researchers tracked participants from kindergarten through adulthood and compared their progress with the progress of similar individuals who were not in the program.

Other long-term studies have been conducted since the High/Scope project began. These studies also show positive academic and social results for students who attended high-quality pre-k compared to their peers who did not.

Key Elements: Expanding Opportunity and Assuring Quality

Pre-k initiatives that yield the most benefit give priority to two key elements: expanding opportunity for children to participate and assuring high program quality.

EXPANDING OPPORTUNITY

By 2005, 38 states provided pre-k programs, although most continue to limit enrollment to the groups they have historically served: disabled and low-income children. Only a few states provide pre-kindergarten to all 4-year-olds who want to attend. As a result, large numbers of young children have no access to pre-k programs.

In 2004–05, 34.8% of the nation’s 4-year-olds were enrolled in a state- or federally-funded pre-kindergarten program. However, the proportion varies considerably by state.

States with the highest and lowest proportion of 4-year-olds enrolled in pre-k.¹

STATES WITH **HIGHEST** ENROLLMENT

OKLAHOMA	92.4%
GEORGIA	67.4%
WEST VIRGINIA	64.6%
VERMONT	64.1%
KENTUCKY	62.1%

STATES WITH **LOWEST** ENROLLMENT

INDIANA ²	16.0%
FLORIDA ²	15.5%
UTAH ²	14.5%
NEVADA	13.2%
NEW HAMPSHIRE ²	12.5%

Source: National Institute for Early Education Research 2005 Yearbook

¹ State and federally funded.

² No state pre-k funding as of 2005.

ASSURING QUALITY

Research has shown that improving access to pre-k is not enough on its own. The benefits for children and schools stem from programs that experts consider high quality—programs with college-educated teachers, small class size, low teacher-student ratios, and learning goals tied to state and local K–3 or K–12 standards. Yet, according to reports, in 2005, fewer than half of state-funded pre-k programs met at least seven of ten benchmarks that represented minimum qualifications.



QUALITY BENCHMARKS FOR STATE PRE-KINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS	NUMBER OF STATES WITH BENCHMARK
Comprehensive early learning standards are defined	27
Teacher has B.A.	24
Teacher has specialized training in pre-k	35
Assistant teacher has Child Development Associate's Credential (CDA) or equivalent	12
At least 15 hours in-service training per year is required	33
Maximum class size is 20	35
Staff-child ratio is 1:10 or better	37
Vision, hearing, health, and one support service are provided	27
At least one meal is provided	23
Site visits are conducted	30

Source: National Institute for Early Education Research, 2005

New Promise:

A Large-Scale Model for Today

Oklahoma is one of the few states to make pre-k available to all 4-year-olds whose families want them to participate. The state's experience shows that even on a large scale, it's possible to deliver high-quality pre-k programs that benefit both individual children and entire school systems.

Operated through the public schools, the program now enrolls 30,000 children, or more than 60% of the state's eligible 4-year-olds—a higher percentage of eligible youngsters than any other pre-k program nationwide. In addition, 94% of local districts participate, with the option to provide half- or full-day service. Together with enrollment in federally funded programs, nine out of every ten 4-year-olds in Oklahoma are enrolled in pre-k.

Oklahoma's program is also noteworthy for maintaining high quality with teachers with B.A.s, low staff-child ratios, small classes, and curriculum informed by comprehensive early learning standards.

Researchers examined state-funded pre-k in Tulsa—the largest district in the state and also one of the most diverse—and assessed children on letter/word identification, spelling, and applied problems. They found significant gains for those who had recently completed pre-k compared with the control group—children very close in age who were just about to start the program:

Children who completed the program had test scores that were **16%** higher than children who had not.

Children attending pre-k had gains of **52%** in letter-word identification, **27%** in spelling, and **21%** in applied problems.

All racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups showed progress, but children from low-income families demonstrated the **LARGEST GAINS**, showing that solid pre-k can be an effective gap-closing strategy.



Big Results:

Better Outcomes for Learners and More Savings for Schools

States and communities that make high-quality pre-k a public priority are in a good position to see big results.

BETTER OUTCOMES FOR LEARNERS

Research has shown that high-quality pre-k programs produce both short- and long-term gains in children's cognitive and social development. Generally, children who participate in programs like these:

- Are better prepared for school
- Perform better on standardized tests
- Are less frequently assigned to special education classes or retained in later years
- Have better school attendance rates
- Are less likely to drop out of school

Children do even better when pre-k standards are aligned to elementary school standards. Several national and state studies have found benefits for young children that extended well beyond kindergarten.

In Michigan, for example, children from the state pre-k program had higher pass rates on fourth-grade literacy and math tests than students not in pre-k. Maryland documented similar gains in reading and math at fifth, eighth, and ninth grades, and several other states also reported gains for former pre-k children.

MORE SAVINGS FOR SCHOOLS

In addition to producing educational gains, high-quality pre-k programs provide savings to federal, state, and local governments. Reduced special education placements and remedial costs result in savings to public school systems. Communities also benefit by better preparing young people for skilled jobs and increasing their economic productivity.

Studies show that pre-k pays, many times over, for the cost of establishing these programs. Although estimates vary, state imple-

mentation of a voluntary, universal preschool for all students could result in an estimated long-term payback of \$2 to \$4 for every dollar spent, for a net savings of \$150 billion nationwide. A study in Texas, for example, found that every \$1 invested in high-quality pre-k yields at least \$3.50 to Texas communities. The economic savings pay off in social benefits, too, as students who attend high-quality pre-k are less likely as adults to be arrested or to use drugs and are more likely to hold jobs, have savings accounts, and own homes.

Estimated benefits of various pre-k initiatives (costs and benefits in 2003 dollars)

	ABECEDARIAN PROJECT <i>0 to 5 year olds</i>	HIGH/SCOPE PERRY PRESCHOOL <i>3 and 4 year olds</i>	CHICAGO CHILD-PARENT CENTERS <i>3 and 4 year olds</i>	META-ANALYSIS¹ <i>3 and 4 year olds</i>
Cost per child	\$42,871	\$14,830	\$6,913	\$6,681
Net benefit <i>(costs less savings)</i>	\$138,635	\$76,426 (age 27) to \$253,154 (age 40)	\$49,337	\$15,742
Savings per dollar invested	\$3.23	\$5.15 to \$17.10	\$7.14	\$2.36

Source: *Budgeting for National Priorities*, The Brookings Institution, 2007. ¹ Washington State Institute for Public Policy

Steps to Take

Know the research. Making the case for voluntary pre-k is straightforward once people see the facts. This includes understanding the key characteristics of good pre-k programs.

Build public awareness about the qualities of good pre-k programs and their influence on student outcomes. Share this information with your colleagues, parents, and the community at large.

Explore your state's funding mechanisms. Both general revenues and dedicated funds (such as state lottery and gaming revenues, tobacco settlement monies, and sales taxes) can fund pre-k programs. Other funding options include government

cost-sharing, endowments, and scholarship programs. It's also important to know whether your state's school aid formula reimburses schools for pre-k students or limits reimbursement—and therefore eligibility—to students at risk of educational failure.

Remember that high-quality pre-k programs will be most effective when they are complemented by continued investments in high-quality elementary and secondary education. Consider creating a continuum of instructional practices and policies from at least pre-k through third grade—beyond would be even better.

Work closely with providers of pre-k in your community. A mixed delivery service model—in which a variety of public and private schools and community agencies offer programs—works well in many states and is required by several.

Form effective coalitions. Identify and work with pre-k supporters at your state education agency; your state school boards association and school administrator organization; the business community, local colleges, and universities; other local and state policy makers; and providers of pre-k programs in your community. Pre-k is one of the few issues that easily garner bipartisan support.



MANY HAPPY RETURNS



The Center for Public Education is an initiative of the National School Boards Association and the National Schools Boards Foundation.



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Children with a high-quality pre-kindergarten education can celebrate their fifth birthday with the skills they need to succeed in school. By expanding these opportunities, school districts, communities, and states will share these happy returns as more and more children make their way through school and into productive adult lives.

For more information about pre-k education, visit the Center for Public Education Web site at www.centerforpubliceducation.org

The Center for Public Education is an initiative of the National School Boards Association and the National Schools Boards Foundation. The Center is working in collaboration with the Kansas Association of School Boards, the Ohio School Boards Association, and the Texas Association of School Boards to promote public awareness of the value of pre-kindergarten for all children.

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