

HIGH-QUALITY EARLY LEARNING AND CARE DRIVES LIFELONG SUCCESS

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U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich, Ranking Member



High-Quality Early Learning and Care Drives Lifelong Success

Ensuring that every child has the opportunity to succeed is the bedrock of the American Dream. A high-quality education that starts early and continues into adulthood enables students to develop the skills necessary to thrive in the modern economy. Unfortunately, many children today are starting off behind and entering kindergarten classrooms with little or no formal education. For these children, catching up to their peers can be a lifelong struggle.

High-quality early learning and care helps close this gap for young children and ensures that they have a solid foundation on which to grow. High-quality programs prepare children for kindergarten and empower them to attain higher levels of education, earn more, and be more likely to be employed. Early learning and care programs can perform one or more roles: they educate and support the development of children, care for children while parents are working, and promote parent engagement and access to a range of services. Programs work best when designed around the whole family as part of a comprehensive two-generation approach.

But high-quality pre-K is out of reach for many families. Half of all preschool-aged children are not enrolled in formal education. Increasing access to, as well as the quality of, pre-K is a key part of strengthening early learning and care from birth to age five. High-quality, universal pre-K is critical to meeting the needs of working families and setting all children on the path to succeed.

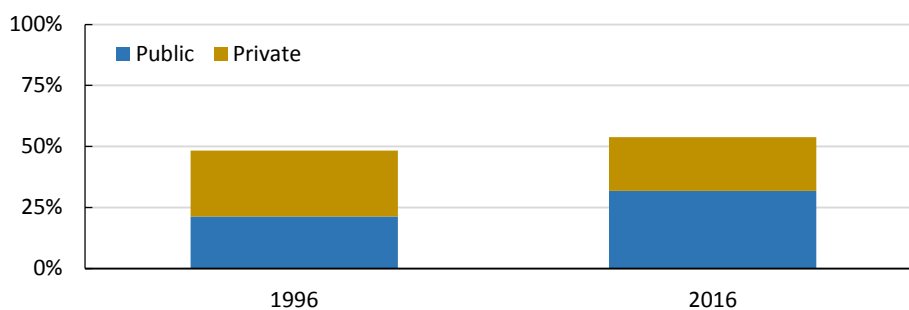
Key Findings

- Despite increased investments in public pre-K, half of all preschool-aged children are still not enrolled in formal education.
- Families often can't afford high-quality private programs: on average, a center-based program consumes 13 percent of a median family's income.
- High-quality early learning and care prepares children for kindergarten and increases their college attendance, future earnings, and employment.
- Mothers of children who receive high-quality early learning and care are more likely to seek out post-secondary education and can earn \$90,000 more over their careers.
- Each dollar spent on early learning and care generates \$7.30 of benefits to society.

Public Investments Expand Pre-K Enrollment

Enrollment in early education has grown over the past two decades. In 2016, just over half of three- and four-year-olds were enrolled in pre-K or kindergarten, an 11 percent increase from 1996 (see Figure 1). This growth is driven by the rise of public pre-K enrollment, which increased by half over the same period. In particular, state-funded pre-K enrollment has dramatically increased; from 2002 to 2016, the share of children enrolled in state-funded programs nearly doubled.¹

Figure 1: Public Pre-K Programs Drive Enrollment Growth



Source: JEC Democratic Staff calculations based on data from Current Population Survey, 1996 and 2016 October Supplements

Note. Data is for three- and four-year-olds enrolled in school (preschool or kindergarten).

Despite this growth, more progress is needed. Nearly half of all three- and four-year-olds are not enrolled in formal education. Additionally, access to publicly-funded pre-K can vary widely depending on where a child lives. For instance, the District of Columbia has enrolled 76 percent of all three- and four-year-olds in city-funded programs, while seven states do not provide state-funded pre-K at all.² Some of these gaps are filled by federal programs such as Head Start, which provides early education, integrated with comprehensive services spanning health, parental engagement, and social services.

Children of color are also less likely to be enrolled in pre-K programs. White, non-Hispanic children have higher enrollment rates than black, Hispanic, Asian, and American Indian and Alaska Native children. Hispanic children have the largest gap and are 20 percent less likely to be enrolled than their white, non-Hispanic peers.³ Other vulnerable populations that, absent publicly-funded programs, face challenges in accessing programs that serve their needs include dual language learners, homeless children, children in foster care, and children of migrant and seasonal workers.⁴

Enrollment figures do not tell the whole story, however, as the quality of pre-K programs is important and varies widely. High-quality pre-K programs educate children using evidence-based practices, rather than only looking after children while parents are at work. Common characteristics of successful pre-K programs include:⁵

- Well-trained, well-compensated teachers with expertise in early childhood development;
- Use of evidence-based teaching practices;
- Small class sizes and frequent, full-day programs;
- Provision of or referral to family and health care services;
- And coordination to provide seamless transition from care prior to pre-K, and after into K-12, such as in the case of state preschool programs operated by school districts.

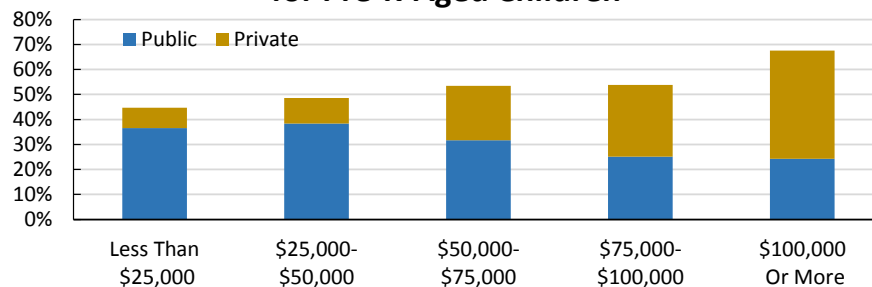
Unfortunately, quality varies substantially across programs and access to high-quality programs varies substantially across communities.⁶ Low-income and black children are less likely than their higher-income and white peers to attend high-quality programs, likely due in part to the high cost of high-quality private programs.⁷

Cost is a Barrier to Early Education

Many families cannot access high-quality private pre-K because it is too expensive. On average, center-based care for a four-year-old costs \$8,469 per year, or 13.1 percent of the median family income.⁸ For a family of four at the poverty level that earns \$24,000, enrolling two kids in preschool would consume more than two-thirds of its income.

The high cost of pre-K forces families to settle for lower-quality programs, or not enroll their children at all. Children in families making less than \$100,000 are 27 percent less likely to be enrolled than children of families making more, and are more likely to rely on public pre-K.⁹

Figure 2: School Enrollment Rises with Income for Pre-K-Aged Children



Source: JEC Democratic Staff calculations based on data from Current Population Survey, 2016 October Supplement

Note: Data is for three- and four-year-olds enrolled in school (preschool or kindergarten) and their family incomes.

The federal government provides affordable access to high-quality services to many families through Head Start. Although children up to 133 percent of the poverty line are eligible for Head Start programs, the program lacks funding to even fully meet the needs of children under the poverty line. Head Start only serves 31 percent of eligible children, leaving behind 1.7 million children.¹⁰ Increasing Head Start funding would enable more families to access high-quality early education and a range of comprehensive services. Fully serving all three- and four-year-olds in poverty would require \$20 billion a year, or about triple the program's current budget.¹¹

Early Childhood Learning Helps Children Succeed

Children of color and children from families with limited resources enter kindergarten behind their peers in reading and math abilities. High-quality pre-K has shown to be effective in reducing these gaps by helping children develop and learn necessary skills for success in kindergarten.

In reading, high-quality pre-K has the potential to reduce the gap by 41 percent for low-income children, compared to their higher-income peers, and almost entirely for black and Hispanic children, compared to their white peers. In math, it can reduce the gap by up to a quarter for low-income children, half for black children, and three-fourths for Hispanic children. For example, when Hispanic children enroll in kindergarten, they are nearly 11 months behind their white peers in math on average—meaning that they need an additional 11 months of education to catch up to the skills and knowledge of their peers. With high-quality pre-K, that gap can narrow to just three months.¹²

Research also shows that early learning and care has profound effects on a child's lifetime educational and economic success. Children who attend high-quality programs from birth to age five have been shown to score higher on math and reading tests through age 21 and are more likely to attend college.¹³ These children also have better employment outcomes: they earn more and are twice as likely to be employed.¹⁴ These effects even reach the next generation: children of pre-K participants are six percent more likely to continue their education beyond required schooling.¹⁵

A Focus on the Whole Family

A child's education cannot be separated from the economic situation of her parents and surrounding community. A parent working multiple low-wage jobs with unpredictable shifts often cannot dedicate as much time to reading to her child. A child that is hungry or homeless has a harder time focusing on learning and is at risk for developmental delays.¹⁶ A holistic approach that focuses on the whole family is needed.

Two-generation programs focus on the whole family by complementing services for children with services for their parents. For example, the United Way's Early Learning Center in Santa Fe, New Mexico offers year-round, full-day services for children alongside technology, employment and social service assistance for parents.¹⁷ By working to improve the entire family's economic and educational situation, the program positions children and families for long-term success.

High-quality pre-K programs are a core part of the two-generation approach. Programs with a holistic focus on family and community, such as Head Start, can connect parents to resources such as job training for themselves or dental services for children.¹⁸ Early learning and care must work with the changing work schedules of today's families. Expecting a parent to pick up a child at noon in the middle of a shift is simply unrealistic for many working parents. Increased funding for Head Start, such as grants to increase the number of hours of care provided, would enable more children of parents working both traditional and non-traditional hours to access early learning and care.¹⁹

As children build a foundation in education, parents get the flexibility, time, and resources to invest in their own skills and careers. Mothers whose children attend high-quality early learning and care programs are more likely to seek post-secondary education and can increase their earnings by \$90,000 over the course of their careers.²⁰ Early learning and care programs lift up entire families and local economies, generating \$7.30 of benefits to society for every dollar spent.²¹

Principles for Universal, High-Quality Pre-K

We need a comprehensive early learning and care system to ensure all children and families have a foundation for success. Currently, the high cost of care and underfunding of public programs are leaving too many children behind. A good first step would be to ensure that all working families have access to universal, high-quality pre-K that meets their needs:

1. *Affordable and Universally Accessible*

An early learning and care plan must ensure that all families can access high-quality, affordable pre-K. No family should have to choose between paying rent, putting food on the table, or being able to afford high-quality pre-K.

2. *Quality Must be a Priority*

High-quality early learning and care from birth to kindergarten is critical to a child's development, and the benefits last long into adulthood and the next generation. We should support the recruitment and retention of a high-quality, well-compensated pre-K workforce and invest in programs that work, such as Head Start.

3. *Meet the Holistic Needs of Working Families*

Early learning and care must meet the needs of modern working families. Programs that cover the entirety of parents' working hours—full day and full year—are not only critical to children, but also to working parents across America. Through the two-generation approach, coordinating pre-K with programs that care for the whole child and help parents pursue work and education will establish a foundation for success for the whole family.

Pre-K Enrollment and Cost by State

State	Enrollment (% of 3- and 4-year-olds)				Child Care Center Cost for a 4-year-old	
	Total Enrolled	All Publicly-Funded	Head Start	State-Funded	Annual Cost	% of Median Income of Family with Children
United States	48%	30%	8%	18%	\$8,469	13.1%
Alabama	44%	23%	12%	10%	\$4,877	9.2%
Alaska	35%	17%	12%	2%	\$10,764	14.3%
Arizona	37%	16%	9%	3%	\$7,845	14.1%
Arkansas	50%	43%	10%	25%	\$5,057	10.0%
California	49%	33%	8%	22%	\$9,117	13.7%
Colorado	52%	27%	7%	16%	\$11,089	14.5%
Connecticut	64%	27%	6%	17%	\$11,669	13.0%
Delaware	47%	17%	8%	4%	\$8,308	11.6%
District Of Columbia	75%	76%	N/A	76%	\$17,863	22.4%
Florida	51%	47%	8%	38%	\$6,897	13.0%
Georgia	51%	37%	6%	30%	\$6,851	12.0%
Hawaii	45%	11%	7%	1%	\$11,232	14.4%
Idaho	30%	10%	7%	0%	\$6,527	11.4%
Illinois	55%	35%	10%	23%	\$9,758	13.9%
Indiana	39%	13%	7%	1%	\$6,768	11.1%
Iowa	48%	40%	6%	33%	\$8,433	12.3%
Kansas	45%	24%	7%	10%	\$8,065	12.2%
Kentucky	40%	28%	11%	17%	\$7,020	13.1%
Louisiana	50%	33%	15%	16%	\$4,920	9.0%
Maine	35%	31%	8%	20%	\$8,455	14.0%
Maryland	52%	28%	6%	21%	\$10,039	11.3%
Massachusetts	59%	16%	4%	8%	\$12,796	13.9%
Michigan	46%	27%	9%	17%	\$8,238	13.4%
Minnesota	45%	12%	6%	1%	\$11,420	14.2%
Mississippi	52%	32%	27%	2%	\$4,439	9.9%
Missouri	45%	15%	8%	2%	\$6,396	10.4%
Montana	42%	18%	16%	0%	\$8,299	12.9%
Nebraska	42%	26%	3%	23%	\$7,935	11.6%
Nevada	34%	12%	4%	2%	\$8,768	15.6%
New Hampshire	55%	12%	5%	0%	\$10,259	11.8%
New Jersey	65%	33%	4%	24%	\$9,557	10.6%
New Mexico	46%	36%	13%	18%	\$6,988	14.2%
New York	58%	39%	8%	25%	\$11,700	17.2%
North Carolina	42%	19%	5%	11%	\$7,920	14.3%
North Dakota	36%	16%	12%	0%	\$7,630	9.8%
Ohio	45%	20%	11%	5%	\$7,320	11.8%
Oklahoma	46%	52%	13%	39%	\$5,280	9.7%
Oregon	45%	13%	N/A	9%	\$9,108	14.6%
Pennsylvania	46%	21%	7%	9%	\$9,119	13.0%
Rhode Island	45%	19%	10%	3%	\$10,052	14.3%
South Carolina	46%	32%	9%	20%	\$4,657	8.4%
South Dakota	36%	19%	15%	0%	\$5,810	9.1%
Tennessee	38%	23%	9%	11%	\$7,113	13.6%
Texas	43%	37%	8%	28%	\$7,813	12.9%
Utah	43%	11%	5%	0%	\$7,167	10.1%
Vermont	47%	64%	8%	55%	\$10,440	13.9%
Virginia	47%	19%	6%	9%	\$9,256	11.7%
Washington	42%	16%	6%	7%	\$9,887	13.6%
West Virginia	34%	44%	6%	39%	\$7,540	14.2%
Wisconsin	44%	46%	8%	36%	\$9,598	13.6%
Wyoming	44%	22%	9%	0%	\$7,841	10.8%

Source: American Community Survey 2015, National Institute of Early Education Research 2016, Child Care Aware 2016

Note: Publicly-funded programs include federal- and state-funded Head Start, state-funded special education programs, and state-funded pre-K as determined by the National Institute of Early Education Research. Total enrolled refers to 3- and 4-year-olds enrolled in any school, including kindergarten. DC and Oregon Head Start enrollment figures are not displayed due to expansive state-funded pre-K programs partnered with Head Start.

¹ JEC Democratic Staff calculations based on http://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/FullYB_8.21.17_compressed.pdf and <http://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/2003yearbook.pdf>.

² http://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/YB2016_StateofPreschool2.pdf

³ JEC Democratic Staff calculations based on CPS October Supplement 2016.

⁴ <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/edcentral/prekparticipation/>;
<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ece/interagency-projects/ece-services-for-homeless-children/>;
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/policy/pi/acf-pi-hs-10-03>

⁵ <http://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/NIEER-AchievementGaps-report.pdf>;
https://www.nhsa.org/files/resources/nhsas_two_generationstogether_report.pdf

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ <https://www2.ed.gov/documents/early-learning/matter-equity-preschool-america.pdf>

⁸ JEC calculations based on Child Care Aware 2016 Survey of Child Care Resource and Referral State Networks; U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2015 one-year estimates, tables B19126 and 19125. Family income is for a family with children. Center-based care includes programs such as Head Start programs, license-exempt programs, school-based programs and state-funded prekindergarten.

⁹ JEC Democratic Staff calculations based on CPS October Supplement 2016.

¹⁰ <https://www.nhsa.org/facts>

¹¹ http://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/HS_Full_Reduced.pdf

¹² <http://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/NIEER-AchievementGaps-report.pdf>

¹³ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4318654/>

¹⁴ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3989926/>;

<http://www.upjohn.org/sites/default/files/Wefocus/FromPreschooltoProsperity.pdf>

¹⁵ <http://www.nber.org/papers/w22700.pdf>; Children of participants are 6 percent more likely to have more than the 9 years of compulsory education.

¹⁶ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4373582/>

¹⁷ <http://www.uwsfc.org/media/>; <http://www.uwsfc.org/kaunekids/>

¹⁸ https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_childcare_boosts_social_capital

¹⁹ <https://ffyf.org/new-294-million-opportunity-head-start-grantees-extend-school-day/>

²⁰ <http://www.web.pdx.edu/~stipakb/download/PA555/EarlyChildhoodEducStudy.pdf>;

https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/docs/the_economics_of_early_childhood_investments.pdf

²¹ https://heckmanequation.org/assets/2017/01/Garcia_Heckman_Leaf_etal_2016_life-cycle-benefits-ecp_r1-p.pdf