

Quality Pre-Kindergarten is critical to **Healthy Development** and **School Readiness**



Investing in the Future of California

“Investing in quality early education today means reaping the benefits of healthier and more productive citizens tomorrow.”

- Dr. Rola Magid, Ventura, CA

Quality early education is critical to a child’s healthy development. Pre-kindergarten provides children with the cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development opportunities they need to enter school ready to learn. However, most young children are not in adequate pre-kindergarten settings to provide such opportunities, and quality programs are often difficult to find and afford. California has addressed this need by creating two state-funded programs- the California State Pre-school Program and the First 5 California School Readiness Initiative, which allocates funds from a tobacco tax towards early childhood development programs. However, funding for these programs is inadequate and many children remain left out.¹

Pre-K has significant health benefits. Head Start, a pre-kindergarten program for 3- and 4-year-olds, has demonstrated immediate health benefits for children by requiring immunizations, linking families to health services, providing nutritious meals, and conducting vision, hearing, and developmental screenings.²

Immediate Health Benefits for Children

- Required immunizations
- Links for families to health services
- Provision of nutritious meals
- Availability of vision, hearing, and developmental screenings

A 2005 study by Judith Palfrey et al found that urban children enrolled in high-quality early education were more likely at age 25 to have private health insurance, have a regular source of health care, visit a physician annually, visit a dentist annually, use condoms, report a health rating of very good/excellent, and have lower rates of depressive symptoms.³ Additionally, those who participated in quality early education programs were less likely to use sedatives, marijuana, and heroin, or smoke cigarettes at age 40.⁴

Long-Term Benefits to Quality Early Education Participants ^{4*}

- More have private health insurance
- More have a regular source of health care
- More visit a physician annually
- More visit a dentist annually
- More use condoms
- More report a health rating of very good/excellent
- They have lower mental health rates of depressive symptoms

*Among urban children

Pre-kindergarten prepares children for later school success. A recent study by Preschool California found that 96% of kindergarten teachers feel that it is important for children to attend a quality preschool program before entering kindergarten, and 95% of kindergarten teachers feel that those who attend prekindergarten are better-prepared for kindergarten than those children who do not.⁵

“Preschool provides a nourishing opportunity to promote language and social skills, allowing a child to become more excited and engaged in his or her world. Upon school entry, preschoolers are better prepared for reading, math, and healthy interactions with their peers and adults.”

- Dr. Edward Chambers, Thousand Oaks, CA

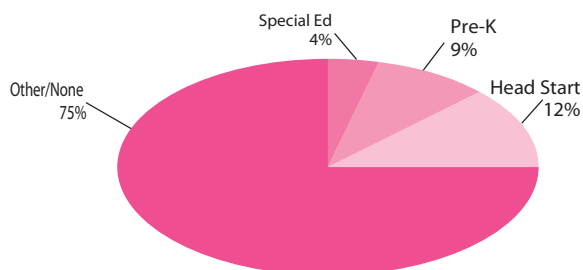
According to a 2004 poll by Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, developmental obstacles are diminished for children who attend quality pre-kindergarten programs. In the poll, 78-93% of kindergarten teachers said children who attended quality preschool programs are more likely to get along with others, be sensitive to others’ feelings, know letters of the alphabet, have problem-solving skills, follow directions, and less likely to disrupt class.⁶ Such learning, coping, and decision-making skills that are acquired during early childhood determine performance in school and set children onto life pathways that affect their health and well-being over time.⁷

Pre-Kindergarten is Linked to Lower Rates of:⁸

- Special education
- Grade retention
- Abortions
- Drug Abuse
- Smoking

Quality early education programs can benefit society economically by reducing the need for reparative expenditures. Long-term research studies link quality early education programs to lower rates of special education, grade retention, abortions, and smoking, all of which economically burden local, state, and federal government.⁸ Pre-kindergarten is also linked to higher achievement test scores, higher graduation rates, and higher post-secondary enrollment rates which positively correlate with greater individual economic success. According to a 2003 report, for every dollar invested in quality early education, society saves between \$4 and

Enrollment of 4-Year-Olds in California



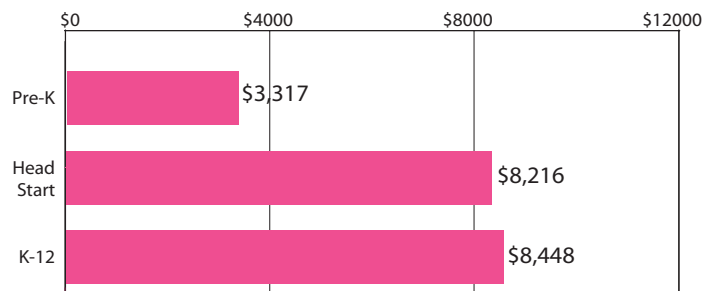
Source: NIEER

\$8 in avoided costs associated with crime and delinquency, welfare participation, special education, and remedial education.⁹

Many of California's children are being left out of pre-kindergarten. In California, nearly half of 4-year-olds are not enrolled in preschool, and there is a waiting list for 76% of the state-funded prekindergarten programs in the state.¹⁰ Head Start only served 6% of 3-year-olds and 12% of 4-year-olds.¹¹ The availability of affordable quality pre-kindergarten programs remains inadequate; tuitions for private part-day pre-k programs often cost more than the yearly California public college tuition.

In addition to availability, the quality of early education varies widely. Most programs do not meet all of the recommended standards, such as low teacher-child ratios, small class sizes, and well-educated teachers. Although the quality of early education increases with higher levels of teacher education and training, most early education professionals are paid significantly less than kindergarten teachers. Subsequent high rates of

Spending Per Child Enrolled in California



Source: NIEER

staff turnover threaten the quality and effectiveness of early education.

State investments in education and development in the earliest learning years constitute a very small percentage of overall public expenditures, in many states less than 1%.¹⁰ In California, the funding per child enrolled in a state-funded pre-kindergarten is nearly one-third of the amount spent in the K-12 school system.¹¹

Greater investment in these critical early years of development could provide the stable foundation that children need for their social, cognitive and emotional well-being.

Endnotes

¹Children Now. (2005). California 2005 Report Card: An Assessment of Children's Well-Being. www.preschoolcalifornia.org/assets/Report-Card-2005.pdf

²Zigler, E., Piotrkowski, C.S., Collins, R. (1994). Health Services in Head Start. *Annual Review of Public Health*:15:511-534.

³Palfrey, J.S., Hauser-Cram, P., Bronson, M.B., Erickson Warfield, M., Sirin, S., Chan, E. (2005). The Brookline Early Education Project: A 25-year follow-up study of a family-centered early health and developmental intervention. *Pediatrics*, 116(1): 144-152.

⁴Schweinhart, L. (2004). *The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study Through Age 40*. Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Press.

⁵Preschool California (2005). Praise for Preschool: California Teachers Say All Children Will Benefit. <http://www.preschoolcalifornia.org/assets/Praise-for-Preschool-web-version.pdf>.

⁶Fight Crime: Invest in Kids (2004). Key Findings: Kindergarten teachers "poll fact sheet." Available at <http://www.fightcrime.org>.

⁷Brown, J. (2002). *The Link between Early Childhood Education and Health*, Seattle, Washington: Economic Opportunity Institute. <http://www.eionline.org/ECE-LinktoHealth.pdf>.

⁸Barnett, S. A Benefit-Cost Analysis of the Abecedarian Early Childhood Intervention. New Jersey: NIEER.

⁹Wright, E. (2003). The Case for Quality Preschool: It Can Be Done. NGA Center for Best Practices.

¹⁰Ibid. Children Now.

¹¹National Institute for Early Education Research (2004). The State of Preschool: 2004 State Preschool Yearbook. www.nieer.org

Docs For Tots is a non-profit organization whose mission is to develop, support, and grow a nationwide network of doctors who will participate in advocating for policies and practices that improve the well-being of our youngest children.