

First 5 Facts



PRESCHOOL FOR ALL: A KEY TO FUTURE SUCCESS FOR CALIFORNIA'S 3- AND 4-YEAR-OLDS

A growing body of research confirms what many parents know—when children attend high-quality preschools, they develop better emotional, intellectual and social skills that benefit them throughout school and their lives.

That is why First 5 California and the Master Plan for Education have established voluntary preschool for all 3- and 4-year-olds as one of their highest priorities. Preschool, which is typically two to three hours per day, together with parental nurturing, access to quality health care and support services, is essential to ensure that all children start school ready to do their best. Universal access to voluntary preschool is one aspect of achieving “school readiness” for children.

QUALITY PRESCHOOL PRODUCES A LIFETIME OF BENEFITS

- Scientific research has consistently shown that children who attend quality preschools will do better in reading and math for the rest of their school careers. They will also develop better social and emotional skills and have more self-confidence. *(Helburn et al, 1995; Kontos et al, 1994; Andersson, 1992; Karoly et al, 1998; Gomby et al, 1995)*
- Studies prove that children who go to quality preschools are more likely to graduate from high school, less likely to become involved in crime, and less likely to have unwanted pregnancies in their teens, resulting in savings that far exceed the cost of these programs. *(Reynolds, et al, 2001; Karoly, et al, 1998)*
- Early learning programs save money. Every dollar invested in quality preschool saves taxpayers \$7.14 in crime costs, welfare dependency and economic losses. *(Reynolds, et al, 2002)*
- The pace of children’s learning during the early years depends significantly on their environment. Learning is maximized when children are in settings that nurture intellectual, social, emotional and physical development, that provide responsive relationships with teachers and offer well-planned curricula. *(Preschool for All: Investing in a Productive and Just Society, Committee for Economic Development, 2002)*
- Quality preschool has been shown to produce long-term benefits for children from both high-risk and low-risk backgrounds. *(Smart Start and Preschool Child Care Quality in NC: Change Over Time and Relation to Children’s Readiness, 2003)*

THOUSANDS OF CALIFORNIA CHILDREN DON’T HAVE ACCESS TO QUALITY PRESCHOOL

- More than one-third of children who enter kindergarten are not emotionally, intellectually, and/or physically ready for school. Quality preschool has been proven to help children be well-prepared for kindergarten.
- A growing majority of 3- and 4-year-olds of all income levels spend time in the care of someone other than their parents. Children in low-quality child care benefit the most from quality preschool programs, even if it is part-time.
- The shortage of quality preschools is felt most strongly in ethnic communities. The complexity and expense of meeting the educational needs of California’s diverse child population can be addressed in part through quality preschool. According to recent data, over 50 percent of babies born in California are Latino, 10 percent are Asian Pacific Islander and seven percent are African American.
- A cost-benefit analysis of early education showed the benefit of quality preschool to society was worth the cost. School districts can expect to save more than \$11,000 per child, as children are less likely to require special or remedial education if they have attended preschool. Children in high-quality programs are also projected to make roughly \$143,000 more over their lifetimes than those who do not participate in high-quality programs. *(National Institute for Early Education Research)*

MANY STATES ARE MOVING TO VOLUNTARY PRESCHOOL FOR ALL

- In Georgia, 70 percent of 4-year-olds participate in the state's preschool program.
- In New York, publicly funded programs serve one quarter of the state's 4-year-olds, a number that is projected to grow as additional programs are funded.
- In New Jersey, preschool is offered to all 3- and 4-year-olds in 30 high-poverty school districts.
- In Illinois, when the state universal preschool plan is fully implemented, more than 200,000 3- and 4-year-olds will be served.
- In Massachusetts, The Early Education for All Bill was introduced in December 2002, which mandates an accessible system of high-quality services—including universal preschool—for young children.
- In Florida, a ballot initiative passed in November 2002 will guarantee free preschool to all 4-year-olds by 2006.

WILL CALIFORNIA FALL FURTHER BEHIND?

- California ranks fifth from the bottom among states in the percentage of 3- and 4-year-olds enrolled in public and private preschools, tied with Nevada. Only Idaho, W. Virginia, and Arizona having fewer children in preschool than California.
- The national average for preschool attendance is 63.7 percent; in California, the average is 51 percent.

THROUGHOUT THE STATE, PLANS ARE UNDERWAY

- First 5 California and First 5 County Children and Families Commissions have already begun to explore diverse strategies to offer voluntary preschool for all at the local level.
- First 5 California is sponsoring AB 56 (Steinberg, Chan, Liu, Daucher) to phase-in voluntary access to universal preschool, beginning in communities with low-performing schools and expanding statewide by 2014.
- First 5 Los Angeles has committed \$100 million to launch a Universal Access to Preschool initiative, which will over time provide access to a high-quality preschool experience for all children in L.A. County.
- First 5 San Mateo has committed \$1 million each year for the next 10 years to provide access to high-quality preschool for the county's 3- to 5-year-olds beginning with children one year prior to entering kindergarten.

WHAT PARENTS SAY

- Californians believe education is the most important problem for California government to address, which ranks above issues such as the economy, crime, taxes and the environment. Offering free preschool to all children in poor neighborhoods tops the list of ways to improve schools. *(The Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning, October 2002, Public Opinion Poll of 1,000 California adults)*
- Because preschool is seen as contributing to the success of K-12 education, Californians believe that funding preschool is an investment that will pay off in improving the quality of elementary and secondary education. *(Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc. "A Statewide Survey of Attitudes Toward Early Education," 2002)*
- Nearly 80 percent of Californians believe there should be some level of state assistance to fund preschool. *(Ibid.)*
- For 73 percent of Californians, the promise of preschool is that it allows students to begin school with more self-confidence and a more positive attitude about learning, which will lead to better reading skills and higher achievement throughout the K-12 system. *(Ibid.)*
- Fearing that less privileged children will be left behind, 70 percent of adults believe that things will be a lot fairer and create a more level playing field if all children in California have the opportunity to participate in early education programs before they start kindergarten—not just kids from families who can afford it. *(Ibid.)*
- In setting priorities for school readiness, 67 percent of parents of young children emphasize access to quality preschools as a priority. *(Ibid.)*

