



A Smart Choice for a Solid Start: Pre-K Works – So Why Not PA?

What do Governor Tom Wolf, former governors Tom Corbett, Ed Rendell, Mark Schweiker and more than 130 Democratic and Republican members of the Pennsylvania General Assembly have in common?

Give up? They all have been strong supporters of high-quality pre-k for Pennsylvania's 3- and 4- year olds. Over the past three years, our state policymakers have increased commonwealth support by \$90 million to ensure nearly 10,000 additional at-risk children are able to attend a high-quality pre-k classroom. And, this budget season is no different as Governor Wolf has proposed another \$40 million increase.

Children only have one chance to be preschoolers and benefit from early learning opportunities. They don't get a do-over when the commonwealth is on better financial ground, or policymakers agree that it's their turn to be at the top of the budget priority list. Today in Pennsylvania, there are only enough public funds to make high-quality, publicly funded pre-k available to 39 percent of at-risk 3- and 4-year-olds. As a result, many low-income families cannot find or afford high quality pre-k essential to their children's success.

A growing body of research has shown that by the age of five, a child's brain will have reached 90 percent of its adult size with more than one million neural connections forming every second,ⁱ but not every child is provided with the stimulating environments and nurturing interactions that can develop those young minds to their fullest potential. High-quality pre-k for 3- and 4-year-olds in Pennsylvania is a proven solution that can help ensure every child is ready to succeed.

We know that high-quality pre-k works. It benefits students, strengthens our schools, saves taxpayer money and helps build a more successful Pennsylvania. This truly once-in-a-lifetime opportunity helps create a solid foundation for the rest of a child's education – from kindergarten to high school graduation and beyond.

The Benefits of a High-Quality Pre-k Experience

High-quality, publicly funded pre-k helps establish a more competitive Pennsylvania and voters will support candidates who commit to policies and investments that will improve the commonwealth's well-being. Creating such a competitive advantage starts with stronger investments in early learning, such as high-quality, publicly funded pre-k that lays the foundation and skill development for a stronger workforce. When a child is afforded

this vital learning experience, he or she enters kindergarten prepared to succeed. Research shows children who attended high-quality pre-k are more likely to read proficiently in third grade, graduate from high school, attend post-secondary education and become successful in the workplace. However, the benefits do not end with each individual child. High-quality pre-k can have a profound macro-level effect across communities, schools, and the state:

- High-quality pre-k investments save taxpayer dollars by reducing the need for special education and remedial instruction.^{ii iii}
- At-risk children who attend a high-quality pre-k classroom are less likely to commit crime later in life, reducing costs associated with public safety, prosecution and incarceration.^{iv v}
- Over the long term, every dollar invested in high-quality pre-k returns the commonwealth \$4 in savings and benefits in the form of reduced crime, increased earning power, and more.^{vi}

As the widespread benefits of high-quality pre-k become better known, a statewide chorus of influential, varied and even surprising voices are rising in support of stronger investments in it.

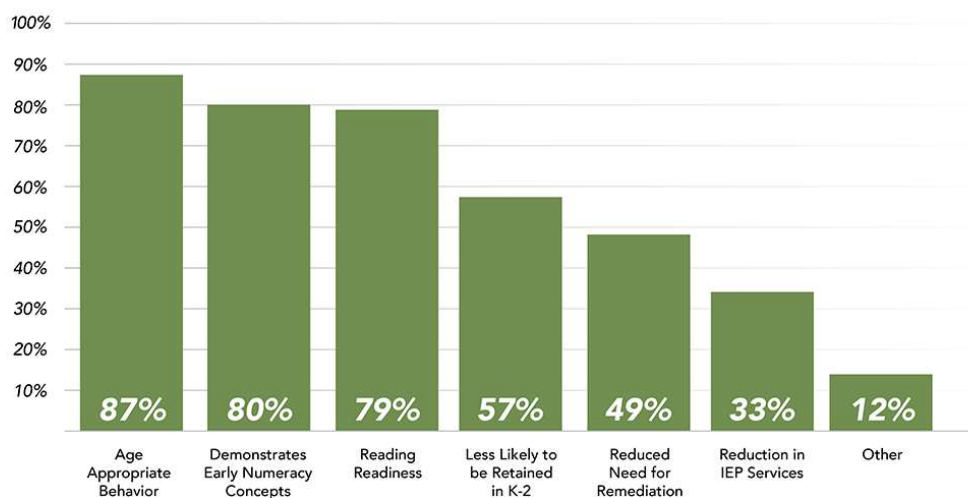
Business leaders increasingly recognize that few investments make as much research-based sense as high-quality early learning programs. They're a smart choice because they provide an immediate boost to our economy and build stronger communities in the long-term. "There is no issue that I concern myself with more than the future of Pennsylvania's workforce," Says Peter Danchak, President of Northeast PA PNC Bank, Scranton. "My company looks to policymakers and candidates for office to make investments that will ensure not only today's workforce but the workforce of tomorrow. We look for individuals who have both the hard and soft skills required to fill jobs in our new economy. One of the wisest investments we can make in our future workforce is stronger public investments in high-quality pre-kindergarten."

Law enforcement officials often cite research showing high-quality pre-k can reduce disruptive, problem behaviors in early childhood that, if left unaddressed, can lead to anti-social and delinquent behavior later in life. "No child is destined from birth to end up in jail. I know from years of experience that we cannot simply arrest, prosecute and incarcerate our way out of our crime problems," says Craig W. Stedman, Lancaster County District Attorney. "We have to implement effective approaches that keep people from turning to crime in the first place. Making high-quality pre-k available to all our most at-risk children is a key component of that strategy."

Military leaders call access to high-quality pre-k a national security issue, noting a strong foundation of early learning is critical to ensuring military readiness. "Today, we confront the unsettling reality that most Americans do not qualify for military service. If they cannot serve our military, they are equally hobbled in their usefulness to businesses and communities. Success of every child in Pennsylvania starts with high-quality pre-k," says Admiral Thomas J. Wilson III, United States Navy (Retired).

In October 2017, the Pennsylvania Principals Association in conjunction with the Pre-K for PA campaign released a new report painting a clear picture of how important high-quality pre-k in the context of a developing child. The report brought attention to a statistically valid survey of over 350 elementary school principals throughout the state. With responses representing rural, suburban, and urban school districts, the message was clear: 97 percent of elementary school principals agree that additional state investments in publicly funded, high-quality pre-k should be made.^{vii} These local education leaders, who are on the frontline of delivering a quality educational experience, also confirmed many of the comprehensive benefits of this early learning opportunity. Survey responses indicated a strong correlation between high-quality pre-k and age appropriate behavior, reading readiness, early numeracy concepts, and the reduction of remediation and IEP services. Not surprisingly, nearly 99 percent of the respondents agreed that publicly funded, high-quality pre-k is an important tool for preparing at-risk students for the academic rigors of kindergarten and beyond.^{viii}

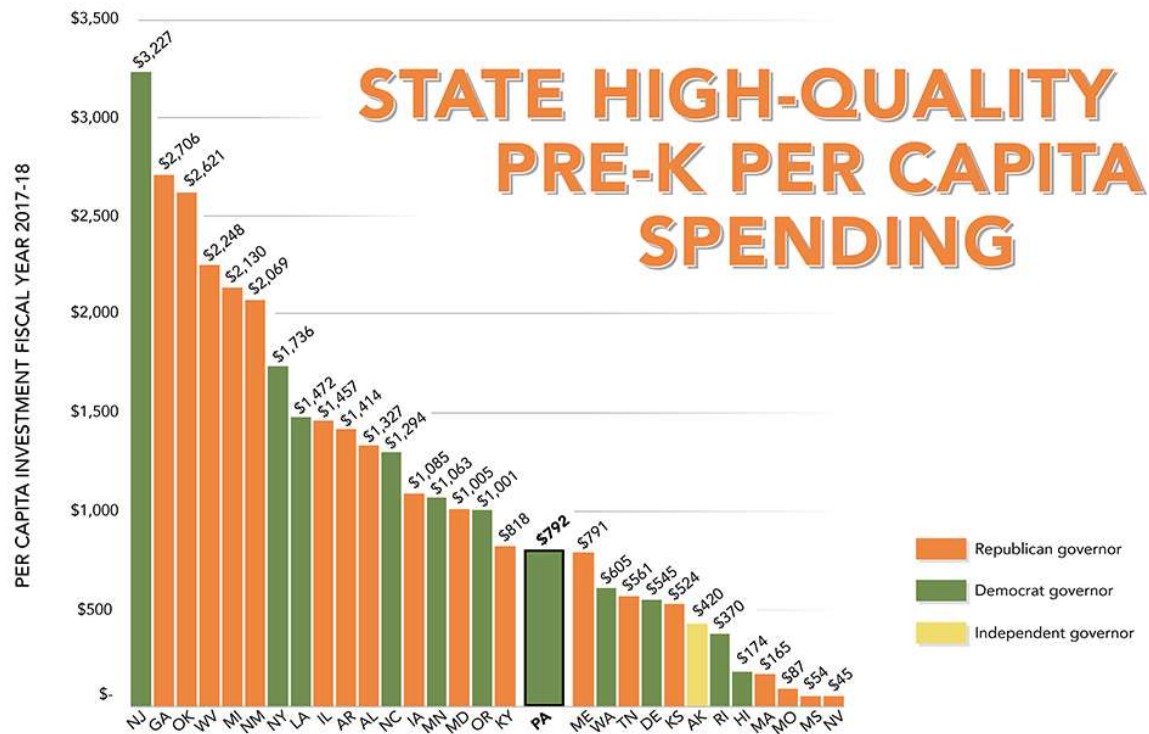
OUTCOMES OF HIGH-QUALITY PRE-K



To learn more about the elementary school principals survey and the impact of high-quality pre-k, you can read the full report at www.prekforpa.org/reports/

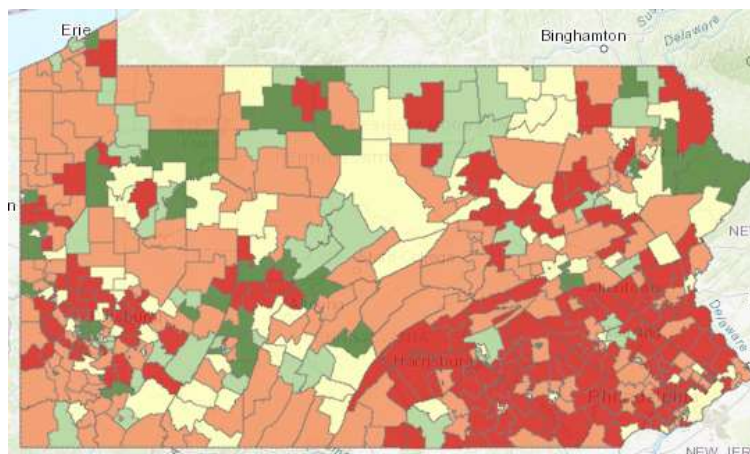
Why Not PA?

Unfortunately, Pennsylvania is compromised in part due to our relatively small pre-k investments. The commonwealth currently ranks 18th out of 30 states in per capita public support for high-quality pre-k according to a report released in January.^{ix} This is despite having increased our investment by \$30 million in the current fiscal year.



Other states are outpacing our commitment, putting the commonwealth at a serious disadvantage with neighboring states such as New York (\$1,736), New Jersey (\$3,227), Maryland (\$1,005) and West Virginia (\$2,248) investing more per capita.^x You can find the full report and complete per capita rankings at www.papartnerships.org/work/early-learning/early-learning-reports.

From a voter’s perspective, the problem could not be more alarming. Approximately 61 percent of eligible children, or 106,000 statewide, will miss the opportunity to attend a high-quality pre-k classroom this year.^{xi} And this is not an issue concentrated in one geographic area of our state. Children missing out on these benefits live in every type of Pennsylvania community – this is the case for 34,000 eligible preschoolers who enter kindergarten in rural school districts; about 44,000 eligible preschoolers entering kindergarten in suburban districts; and more than 27,000 eligible preschoolers who will attend kindergarten in urban school districts next fall.



To learn more about the unmet need in your county, school district or legislative district, visit PPC’s interactive mapping application at: <https://papartnerships.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=66b0cc394e784762bd5e8812cc0ee4ae>.

In order to ensure every at-risk child is provided with the skills and knowledge to succeed in elementary school and beyond, we need to increase the commonwealth’s commitment.

Pre-K Support Crosses Party Lines

Just as support for publicly funded pre-k programs has grown among business and military leaders and law enforcement officials, it also has grown on a state and national scale among elected leaders and voters – and the support stretches across political parties. High-quality pre-k is not solely a “red state” or “blue state” priority. When it comes to giving children a great start in life, the nation is increasingly “purple.” Since 2012, states have increased public funding for pre-k programs by nearly half (47 percent) with the total investment eclipsing \$8 billion across all 50 states.^{xii} In 2017-18 alone, states committed over \$310 million of additional state revenue for pre-k. Here in Pennsylvania, Democrat Gov. Tom Wolf has recognized the need for stronger pre-k investments, as did his predecessor, Republican Gov. Tom Corbett. This support also extends across the General Assembly, where more than 130 members of the House and Senate – half of the entire legislature - belong to the bi-partisan Early Childhood Education Caucus.

“The time to make Pennsylvania a leader in high-quality pre-k investment is now. There is no better investment in our children, our communities and the future economic vitality of our commonwealth. Our kids have only one chance to benefit from high-quality, publicly funded pre-k. We are proud of the bipartisan support pre-k now enjoys in our state, but we can and must do better.” – Former Pennsylvania Governors Edward G. Rendell and Mark S. Schweiker.

Not surprisingly, this support aligns with voter sentiments. According to a 2017 national poll conducted by Public Opinion Strategies and Hart Research, 74 percent of the electorate says that quality early childhood education sets children up for academic success in elementary school, and 69 percent of voters say high-quality early childhood programs lead to a larger pool of highly skilled workers in the long term.^{xiii} Pennsylvania voters express strong, bipartisan support as well. A statewide poll of more than 800 likely voters conducted in 2014 found that 63 percent of Pennsylvanians consider pre-k to be a top or high priority issue.^{xiv} Support for expanding access is also strong across party lines as the poll found that in both parties (and among independents), a majority of likely voters favors giving every 3- and 4-year-old access to high-quality pre-k. In a national context, this will

be important to voters not only in Pennsylvania, but in many other states as 12 of the 17 states that invest more per capita than the commonwealth also will head to the polls to elect a governor. Some of these states include Alabama, Georgia, Illinois, Maryland, Michigan, New York and Oklahoma – some with world class cities, strong inner-ring suburbs and rural communities that drive state economies.

This broad voter support rests on two strongly held values: voters recognize the importance of ensuring all children arrive at kindergarten ready to learn, and they recognize the positive outcomes that will be generated. Year after year, the economy and education are among the top issues weighing on the minds of these individuals. Candidates who commit to stronger state investments in high-quality pre-k will be proposing a winning combination for voters on both fronts.

Higher Quality = Greater Impact

Pennsylvania must take aggressive steps to put our kids on a comparable playing field to their peers in other states. Ensuring more children, especially those who are at-risk, can benefit from high-quality pre-k and enter school better prepared must be part of that goal. But what exactly defines high-quality?

The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) has set the standard for high-quality pre-k programs, having convened a national research advisory panel to review the literature on pre-k and create a 10-point rating scale, which includes teacher qualifications, standards, group size, child-adult ratios, etc. Both PA Pre-K Counts and the Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program received a ranking of 9.^{xv} Accreditation is another indicator of high-quality. The Council on Accreditation, National Association for the Education of Young Children, National Early Childhood Program, National Association of Family Child Care and the Middle States Commission all provide accreditation for Pennsylvania pre-k programs based on high-quality standards.

Pennsylvania wisely relies on a variety of public and private programs to provide high-quality pre-k. This mixed-delivery system includes programs that have reached key quality standards such as child care programs with Keystone STAR 3 and 4 designations, Pre-K Counts grantees, private academic schools, public schools, and other programs accredited by the entities listed above.

However, the need for a high-quality pre-k experience that includes rigorous curriculum, qualified staff, a supporting learning environment, and small class sizes does not come without costs. The economic reality for many low-and-middle income families is that the cost of high-quality pre-k may be out of reach. One study estimated it at approximately \$8,800 a year calculated based on the traditional school schedule – six hours per day and 185 days per year.^{xvi} This represents a significant share of a family's budget. Take, for example, a single parent who has an annual income of \$53,600 and a three-year-old child. For this family, the cost of pre-k is equal to 16 percent of total income. That share is on par with annual transportation costs, and the only larger expenditure for a typical middle-class family is housing at 33 percent.^{xvii}

Considering the high costs of private pre-k can consume such a large portion of income, it's hardly surprising that children from families in lower income brackets are enrolled in any type of pre-k, public or private, at much lower rates than those in families in the highest two income brackets.

Pre-K Works – So Why Not PA?

High-quality pre-k can help ensure all of Pennsylvania's children enter school with a solid foundation for the years of learning that lie ahead. When a child enters school with the academic, social and emotional skills that high-quality pre-k helps provide, it benefits not only that individual student, but also that student's peers. Prepared young learners are apt to be more focused and engaged in the classroom, meaning fewer disruptions or delays that can sidetrack others from reaching their fullest academic potential.

Of course, the sooner every 3- and 4-year-old child in the commonwealth can attend a high-quality pre-k classroom, the sooner benefits will accrue. That sense of urgency gave rise to the establishment of the Pre-K for PA campaign in January 2014.

The "Pre-K for PA" campaign's goal is to ensure every 3- and 4-year-old in Pennsylvania has access to high-quality pre-k, and that goal starts with educating the public and policymakers about the benefits and elevating the discussion on how it can be made available to every family that wants it for their child. The campaign is led by the following 11 founding partner organizations: Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, Public Citizens for Children and Youth, the Delaware Valley Association for the Education of Young Children (DVAEYC), Trying Together, United Way of Pennsylvania, United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey, the Economy League of Greater Philadelphia, Mission Readiness, Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, and the Pennsylvania Head Start Association. Today, our ranks include more than 130 Leadership Council members, 600 supporting organizations, and nearly 16,000 grassroots advocates. You can learn more about this effort and join the campaign by visiting www.prekforpa.org.

Nobel Prize winning economist James Heckman explains it this way: "The logic is quite clear from an economic standpoint. We can invest early to close disparities and prevent achievement gaps, or we can pay to remediate disparities when they are harder and more expensive to close. Either way we are going to pay ... but, there is an important difference between the two approaches. Investing early allows us to shape the future. Investing later chains us to fixing the missed opportunities of the past. Controlling our destiny is more in keeping with the American spirit." That is why the Pre-K for PA Campaign resoundingly supports Governor Wolf's 2018-19 budget proposal to expand high-quality, publicly funded pre-k by an additional \$40 million. This increase will help ensure 4,400 additional at-risk 3- and 4-year olds will be able to attend a high-quality pre-k classroom this coming fall. Our long-term goal is that by 2022, every at-risk child will have access to a high-quality pre-kindergarten program and middle-income families will more easily afford these services for their children.

The time has come for our elected officials, those seeking elected office and Pennsylvania voters to put the needs of our children first by making high-quality pre-k accessible to every 3- and 4- year old in the commonwealth. By dramatically increasing accessibility and affordability, Pennsylvania can reap short- and long-term benefits that pay off for all of us. Investing more in our youngest learners is not only a smart step – it's a necessary one.

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