

Other states are outpacing Pennsylvania when it comes to expanding access to high-quality pre-kindergarten programs, putting us at a competitive disadvantage. This briefing paper details how the commonwealth currently provides public funding for pre-k programs and how a stronger state-level commitment to funding can make Pennsylvania a national leader in high-quality pre-k.

Access to high-quality pre-kindergarten gives young children the opportunity to make the most of a critical period in their academic, social, and emotional development. A large and growing body of research shows high-quality pre-k not only helps children succeed as they head to kindergarten but also reduces later-life costs to taxpayers and fuels a stronger economy.

Because of its proven benefits and return on investment for taxpayers, high-quality pre-k has earned broad, bipartisan support among Pennsylvania policymakers and voters. A statewide poll found 63 percent of Pennsylvania voters support increasing funding for pre-k, with 58 percent supporting increased funding even if it increased their taxes.¹ That support also can be seen in other states, several of whom have outpaced Pennsylvania by investing more aggressively - even amid a sluggish national economy - to make high-quality pre-k more available to 3- and 4-year-olds.

Pennsylvania is losing ground on pre-k access compared to many other states that compete with us for businesses and jobs - including most of our neighboring states.

Pennsylvania dropped to 30th place nationally in providing pre-k access to 4-year-olds in 2012-13, down from 28th place a year earlier, according to a recently released national report card on pre-k investments.² The commonwealth also fell in the rankings for pre-k access for 3-year-olds, slipping to 14th place from 12th place a year earlier.

The State of Pre-K in PA: Quality and Access

If Pennsylvania wants to see the greatest academic and societal benefits from its pre-k investments, the commonwealth needs to focus on two issues:

- Ensuring our pre-k programs are high quality; and
- Making those high-quality programs widely available so more children can benefit.

While Pennsylvania already has high-quality pre-k programs, those programs serve relatively few children – a shortcoming we must address if we want to make Pennsylvania an educational leader and, in turn, a preeminent economic force in the nation.



ISSUE BRIEF

The National Perspective: How Pre-K in PA Compares to Competing States

About 53,000 Pennsylvania children benefit from high-quality pre-k that is funded through state or federal sources (see below chart), but that represents only about 18 percent - or about 1 in 6 - of the nearly 300,000 3- and 4-year-olds in the state. That means about 244,000 children lack access to publicly funded, high-quality pre-k every year.

Pennsylvania's Pre-K Investments

| Pennsylvania Publicly Funded Pre-k Program | 2012-13 State Budget | 2012-13 Federal Budget | 2012-13 Children Served ³ |
|---|----------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Pre-k Counts (PKC) ⁴ | \$82.8M | - | 21,617 |
| Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program (HSSAP) ⁵ | \$37.3M | - | |
| Keystone STARS 3 and 4 ⁶ | \$19.9M | \$22.4M | |
| Federal Head Start ⁷ | - | \$248.1M | 27,136 |
| Public School Pre-K ⁸ | \$25.5M | - | 4,180 |
| TOTAL | \$165.4M | \$270.5M | 52,933 |

Defining High-Quality Pre-K

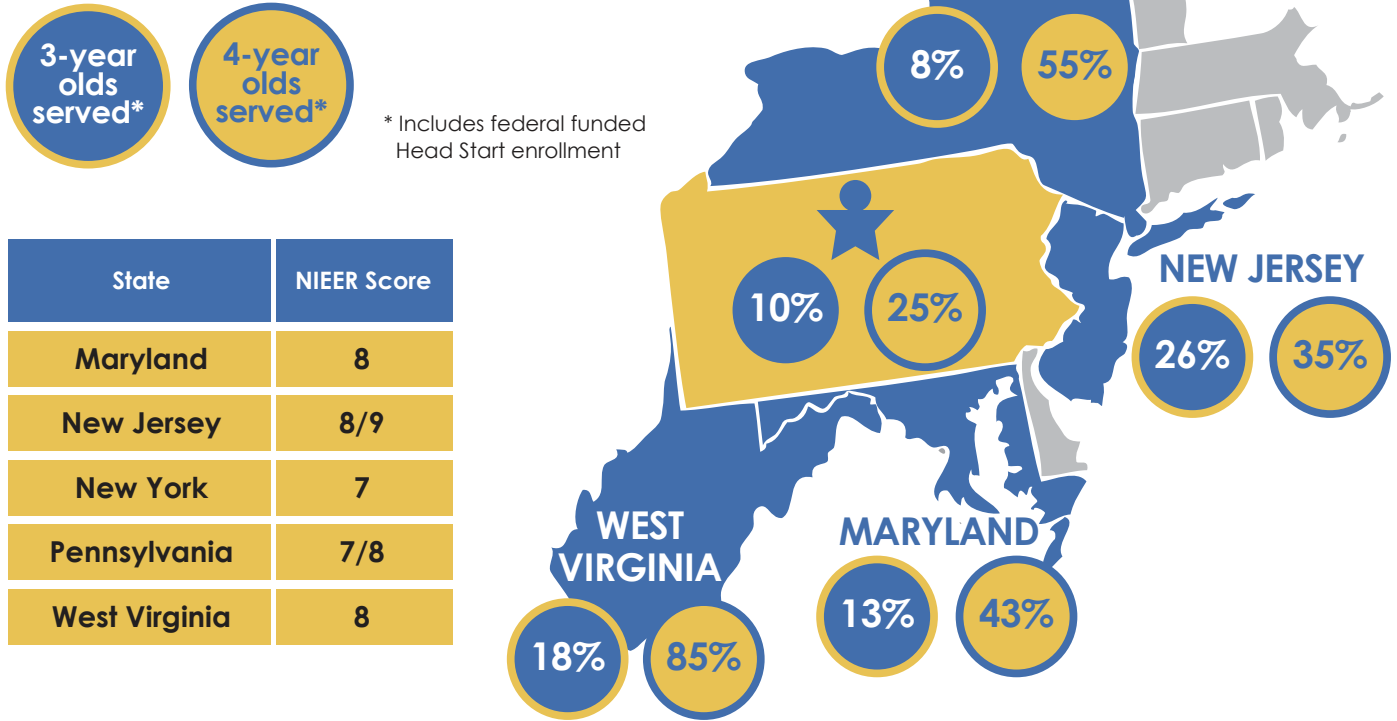
The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) measures the quality of pre-k programs across the country using 10 criteria, including the use of comprehensive early learning standards, teacher qualifications, class sizes, staff-to-child ratios, and other benchmarks. Additionally, we consider Pennsylvania programs that employ teachers with college degrees and early childhood training or are accredited by the Council on Accreditation, National Association for the Education of Young Children, National Early Childhood Program Accreditation, or National Association for Family Child Care as high quality.

In all, 27 states and the District of Columbia have pre-k programs that meet seven or more of the 10 quality standards established by NIEER. Pennsylvania is one of those states. Our high-quality Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts program meets seven of the 10 standards, and the Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program (HSSAP) meets eight of the 10 standards. But among those 27 states and D.C., only a handful can claim to have high-quality programs that also are broadly available, meaning they serve a sizeable segment of the 3- and 4-year-old population. Pennsylvania is not among these higher enrollment states.

Several States Are Outpacing Us

Many of our neighboring states are making high-quality pre-k available to a far higher percentage of young learners. This strategic decision by other states puts Pennsylvania at a competitive disadvantage, as research has proven the benefits of high-quality pre-k in building a stronger workforce, bolstering employment rates, and fueling higher lifetime earnings.

High-quality Pre-k in Neighboring States



Beyond these neighboring states, there are additional states worth noting that have not only made a commitment to high-quality pre-k but have also made the financial investments to ensure high percentages of their preschool age children benefit:

OKLAHOMA'S state-funded pre-k program scored a nine on the NIEER quality rating scale. Using funds from this program and federal Head Start, Oklahoma provides pre-k to 87 percent of its 4-year-olds. Fourteen percent of Oklahoma 3-year-olds are served with federal Head Start funds.

THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA received an eight from NIEER and serves 96 percent of its 3-year-olds and 100 percent of its 4-year-olds using funding from their high-quality pre-k program and federal Head Start.

GEORGIA'S state pre-k program scored eight on the NIEER scale and, coupled with resources from federal Head Start, serves 65 percent of its 4-year-olds. Federal Head Start makes pre-k available to 8 percent of Georgia's 3-year-olds.

IOWA received a NIEER rating of seven and serves 65 percent of its 4-year-olds and 8 percent of its 3-year-olds using state and federal Head Start funds.

Making PA a Leader in Pre-K

The Pre-K for PA campaign is mindful of the fiscal challenges Pennsylvania faces, yet prioritizing investments in high-quality pre-k can be a means to alleviating those challenges. While increasing access to high-quality pre-k will require additional state and/or federal resources, the proven, long-term benefits of high-quality pre-k will ease other areas of state spending.

A recent economic impact study conducted by ReadyNation/America's Edge found that if Pennsylvania increased public investments to make high-quality pre-k available to every 3- and 4-year-old, it would generate \$1.79 in immediate economic activity for every \$1 invested.

That means if Pennsylvania funded high-quality pre-k for all 3- and 4-year-olds, our investment would initially generate about \$800 million in additional goods and services and create almost 28,000 new jobs. Those economic benefits only grow over the long term, as studies show every \$1 invested in pre-k eventually returns up to \$17 in savings and benefits through the economic ripple effect of reducing costs to our schools and society (including significant criminal justice savings), generating stronger earning potential in our workforce, and increasing tax revenues from a more robust economy.

Clearly, other states – including several that border Pennsylvania – recognize the educational, social, and economic benefits of increasing access to high-quality pre-k. That's why they have chosen to prioritize expanded access to high-quality pre-k as a tool for growing their workforce and their economies.

While Pennsylvania leaders acknowledge the benefits of high-quality pre-k, the commonwealth needs to make a stronger collective commitment to expanding access to high-quality programs for our 3- and 4-year-olds. The longer we defer additional investments in high-quality pre-k, the greater the risk to the long-term success of our children and the competitive standing of the commonwealth.

REFERENCES

- ¹ "Survey Findings," Pre-K for PA, 2014. Available at <http://www.prekforpa.org/survey-findings/>
- ² Barnett, W.S., Carolan, M.E., Squires, J.H., Clarke Brown, K., The State of Preschool 2013, National Institute for Early Education Research, May 2014
- ³ "A Smart Choice for a Solid Start: The Case for Pre-k in PA," Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, 2014. Available at http://www.papartnerships.org/publication_files/the-case-for-pre-k-in-pa-feb-2014.pdf
- ⁴ PA Budget 2012-13
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ Estimate based on 2012-13 average cost per child in Child Care Works (CCW) including tiered reimbursement, number of CCW preschoolers 2012-13, percent of CCW preschoolers in STAR 3-4, and the estimated split between state/federal allocations
- ⁷ "Head Start Program Facts Fiscal Year 2013," U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2014. Available at <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/data/factsheets/2013-hs-program-factsheet.html>
- ⁸ Barnett, W.S., Carolan, M.E., Squires, J.H., Clarke Brown, K., The State of Preschool 2013, National Institute for Early Education Research, May 2014
- ⁹ These percentages include federally funded Head Start programs along with high-quality, state-funded programs.

About Pre-K for PA

Pre-K for PA is an issue campaign supported by individuals and organizations across Pennsylvania who believe that investing in our children is the right choice and an urgent necessity.

Our vision is that every 3- and 4-year-old in Pennsylvania will have access to high-quality pre-k. The campaign's founding statewide leadership includes:

