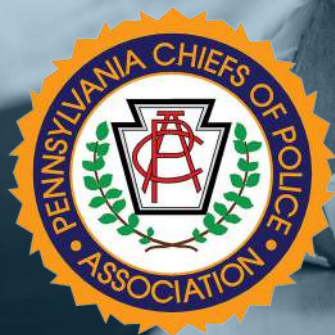


# Law Enforcement: High-Quality Pre-K Helps Drive Children's Path to Success and Protects Public Safety



## Acknowledgements

**Council for a Strong America** is a national, bipartisan nonprofit that unites five organizations comprised of law enforcement leaders, retired admirals and generals, business executives, pastors, and prominent coaches and athletes who promote solutions that ensure our next generation of Americans will be successful, productive members of society.

### **Fight Crime: Invest in Kids**

Thousands of police chiefs, sheriffs, prosecutors and violence survivors protecting public safety by promoting solutions that steer kids away from crime

*Supported by tax-deductible contributions from foundations, individuals, and corporations.*

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## Executive Summary

**While no child is destined at birth to end up incarcerated, the road to criminal behavior is paved with such challenges as poverty, childhood abuse and neglect, parenting challenges, inadequate preparation for school, unaddressed behavior problems, poor academic performance, and, ultimately, dropping out of school and engaging in crime. All too often these problems can plague families for generations.**

Law enforcement leaders know that one of the best ways to keep young people from becoming involved in crime later on is to make sure they have a foundation for success in their earliest years. By providing access to high-quality early education for kids today, we can see less crime and incarceration in the future while reaping

millions in taxpayer savings and other economic benefits.

This is why Pennsylvania’s century-old law enforcement associations—the Pennsylvania District Attorneys Association, the Pennsylvania Sheriffs’ Association, and the Pennsylvania Chiefs of Police Association—have partnered with Fight Crime: Invest in Kids for almost 20 years in supporting greater access to high-quality pre-kindergarten in order to help break the often generational cycle of crime.

The path to success in life is driven by school readiness, the ability to get along with others and regulate and control behavior, academic achievement, and pathways to meaningful careers. Research shows high-quality pre-k is an important part of that progression. A study that followed children who participated in a high-quality pre-k and “parent-coaching”



program through Chicago's Child-Parent Centers found that children not served by the program were 70 percent more likely to be arrested for a violent crime by age 18 than those who participated.

While we know that “crime doesn’t pay,” Pennsylvania does pay for crime. Even though overall crime rates are decreasing in many jurisdictions, Pennsylvania is still spending nearly \$2.55 billion annually on incarcerating adults at the local and state levels.

Quality pre-k programs return an average “profit” (economic benefits minus costs) to society of up to \$27,000 for every child served. The analysis measured the economic benefits of both cutting crime and the cost of

incarceration, reducing other costs such as special education and grade retention, and increasing participants’ future wages. Applying that cost savings estimate to the approximately 32,000 Pennsylvanian children from low-income families who are currently served by the Pre-K Counts and Head Start State Supplemental Assistance programs could realize Pennsylvania about \$864 million in societal benefits over their lifetimes.

Pennsylvania’s law enforcement leaders believe that government’s most fundamental responsibility is to protect the public safety. Government cannot fully meet this responsibility, however, without making sure that Pennsylvania’s children most at-risk of educational failure have access to interventions that will help form the foundations of productive and law-abiding lives. We have a choice today, and it boils down to dollars and common sense. If we invest in our kids today, we will pay far less for the costs of crime and lack of educational success in the years to come. That’s being “smart” on crime.

## **Too Many Children Are Falling Behind Before They Start School**

Fortunately, we can steer thousands of Pennsylvania’s children toward successful lives through high-quality early education that research has shown can lead to less child abuse and neglect, better performance in school, less high school dropout and, ultimately, fewer crimes and a reduction in incarceration.

The research behind these outcomes shows that the early childhood period (birth to age five) is a time of rapid brain development, with more than one million new brain connections forming every second.<sup>1</sup> Early experiences play a large role in determining

how brain connections are formed and the “wiring” that becomes the foundation on which all later learning is built.

Some children face challenges in learning to control impulses and behavior so they can get along with other students and teachers. High-quality early education and care can help these children get back on track, both academically and behaviorally, so they will be ready for kindergarten, despite these early challenges. High-quality early childhood programs also engage with parents, to support them in their role as their children’s first teachers.

James Heckman, the Nobel Prize-winning economist from the University of Chicago, has conducted groundbreaking work with economists, statisticians and neuroscientists and has demonstrated that the quality of early childhood development strongly influences health, social, and economic outcomes. He argues that we should invest sufficiently in younger children—including pre-k—and in providing “coaching” for their parents because those early investments will pay off later on by establishing kids on a path to be successful adults.<sup>2</sup>

## The Pathway to Less Crime

The path we set children upon in their earliest years can make a huge difference as they proceed through school and beyond. Research has shown that high-quality early education and care from birth through pre-k will result in more successful outcomes:

### 1. Less child abuse and neglect:

The Chicago Child-Parent Centers (CPC) is a pre-k program that has served over 100,000 children and followed a sample of them up to age 28. This program also coaches parents to help them understand

## Pennsylvania spends \$3.5 billion on corrections each year



Although crime rates have fallen over the past 20 years, including in Pennsylvania, there are still 1.2 million violent crimes and 7 million property crimes committed against people in our communities across America every year. **More than 39,000 violent crimes are committed annually in Pennsylvania, which is a rate of 306 per 100,000 people.**<sup>3</sup>

Pennsylvania had just over 41,500 inmates in Department of Corrections jurisdiction as of July 2020.<sup>4</sup>



Nationally, we spend more than \$80 billion per year on incarceration.<sup>5</sup> **Pennsylvania spends \$2.5 billion per year on incarcerating adults at the state level<sup>6</sup> and another \$1 billion at the county level** and more than \$45,000 per state prison inmate,<sup>7</sup> which is almost three times what the state spends on its public school students annually (\$16,395)<sup>8</sup> and more than four times what is spent on preschool students (\$8,750 for Pre-K Counts and \$10,500 for Head Start Supplemental Assistance).<sup>9</sup>

**In Pennsylvania, 38 percent of incoming state prison inmates have less than a 12th grade education.**<sup>10</sup>

Some inmates continue their education in prison, so 28.4 percent of current inmates have less than a 12th grade education and the average reading level is middle 8th grade.<sup>11</sup>



their children’s health needs, create safer home environments, and strengthen parenting skills. CPC cut child abuse and neglect in half for the children served, compared with similar children from families not being helped.<sup>12</sup>

## 2. Fewer behavior problems:

Pennsylvania’s Pre-K Counts Public-Private Partnership program (the precursor to the current Pre-K Counts program) cut—from 22 percent to 4 percent—the number of children at risk for problematic social and self-control behaviors.<sup>13</sup> This program was also found to help children learn self-control and self-regulating behaviors, which led to fewer of those children needing special education.

## 3. Better school outcomes:

- **Ready for school:** Boston’s pre-k program improved mathematics, literacy, and language skills among participating children equivalent to seven months of additional learning, compared with children who did not attend.<sup>14</sup> State pre-k programs are also reporting similar important improvements in academic skills among the children that attend their programs.<sup>15</sup>
- **Not Held Back in School:** Participants in Michigan’s state pre-k, the Great Start Readiness Program, were held back in school 51 percent less often than non-participants.<sup>16</sup> New Jersey’s pre-k program found its children were held back 40 percent less often.<sup>17</sup>
- **Increases in reading and math scores that persist:** North Carolina’s Smart Start and More at Four initiatives to improve early education found that the children in counties that spent more per student were two months ahead in reading at fifth grade and 1.5 months ahead in math by fifth grade when compared with children

in counties that spent less per student.<sup>18</sup> In addition, these results were maintained at least through eighth grade, with both programs leading to increased math and reading test scores.<sup>19</sup> New Jersey’s pre-k program, which served disadvantaged school districts statewide, reported that participating children were three-fourths of a year ahead in math and two-thirds of a year ahead in literacy in fourth and fifth grades.<sup>20</sup> These findings show that academic gains from high-quality pre-k continue to have a positive impact for students, and that investing in early education can lead to greater academic achievements later on. The New Jersey researchers report that their findings are on par with the earlier results achieved by Chicago’s CPC program, which later went on to achieve very strong graduation and crime reduction outcomes.

## 4. Less high school dropout:

- The Chicago CPC pre-k program reported a 29 percent increase in high school graduation rates by age 20 among its participants;<sup>21</sup>

### Increasing graduation rates decreases serious crime

Economists studied the relationship over time between changes in graduation rates and crime. They concluded that a 10 percentage point increase in graduation rates reduces murder and assault rates by about 20 percent.

Source: Lochner & Moretti (2004) *The American Economic Review*

*Three Pennsylvania law enforcement leaders, each with decades of experience, were interviewed by Fight Crime: Invest in Kids. These conversations, which are summarized and edited for length, are their personal viewpoints and were not offered as official law enforcement association statements.*



## **Robert E. Fyock**

**SHERIFF, INDIANA COUNTY**

I have served my country and my hometown in law enforcement for 48 years. I served in the Army as a Military Police Officer and am a Vietnam veteran. I've been a correctional officer, deputy sheriff, jail warden, chief county detective. Today, I'm humbled to be in my 17th year as Indiana County sheriff.

I have gotten to know many wonderful families. However, I'm also dealing with the fifth and sixth generations of families that break the law, get arrested, and start the cycle over again by perpetuating distrust of law enforcement officials.

That's why I try to spend as much time as possible with young children. When kids are 3 or 4 years old, I can make a lasting impression. I take my K-9 deputy, Bak, to their churches or quality early childhood education programs. Some kids say they don't trust me, because that's what they've been taught, but by the time we're done, we're best buddies. Years later, they'll see me on the street and say hi. Some even ask for a new copy of Bak's K-9 trading card, because the old one I gave them is worn out.

Many of the children in quality early childhood programs are getting the affection and direction they don't get at home. They are learning how to function in society through listening, complying with directions, and getting along with others.

If they don't get that solid start, too many head down the road to trouble as early as elementary school. As young adults, they land in our prisons. As state inmates, they're costing taxpayers over \$45,000 a year, and that doesn't even count county prison populations.

We're paying for their failure. If we invest more in early learning, we'll be ahead of the game. We can't possibly arrest our way out of a culture of criminality. The solution is setting a good example to keep children from joining the negative aspects of society.

I've seen too many kids get off to a bad start. Quality early childhood education builds a foundation of learning and good behavior that helps them find constructive purpose and grow up to be law-abiding citizens.

**“Quality early childhood education builds a foundation of learning and good behavior that helps them find constructive purpose.”**

- Michigan’s Great Start Readiness program reported a 35 percent increase in graduates,<sup>22</sup> and
- Michigan’s Perry Pre-K Program saw a 44 percent increase in graduation rates.<sup>23</sup>

It’s significant to note that in Pennsylvania, 14 percent of high school students still fail to graduate in four years.<sup>24</sup>

#### 5. Less crime:

- Children *not* served by the Chicago CPC program were **70 percent more likely to be arrested for a violent crime by age 18.**<sup>25</sup>
- A recent study of Oklahoma’s universal Pre-K program found the program decreases the likelihood that Black children are later charged with a crime at age 18 or 19 for both misdemeanors and felonies.<sup>26</sup>
- By age 27, children *not* served by the Perry Pre-K Program were **five times more likely to be chronic offenders, with five or more arrests.**<sup>27</sup>

#### 6. Less Incarceration:

- By age 24, the **people served by the Chicago CPC were 20 percent less likely to have served time in a jail or prison.**<sup>28</sup>
- By age 40, the people served by the Perry Pre-K program were **46 percent less likely to have been sentenced to prison or jail.**<sup>29</sup>

### Findings from Pennsylvania Incoming State Prisoner Survey

An optional background survey was administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections to all incoming male inmates who were beginning to serve their sentences between January 8, 2018 and February 2, 2018. Of the 528 new inmates, 496 completed the survey, resulting in a 94 percent participation rate.

“Being smart on crime involves being proactive and investing in proven strategies that help put young people on a path filled with opportunity and out of the criminal justice system, saving taxpayer money in the long run. High-quality pre-k is one of those strategies.”



**Heather L. Adams**  
Lancaster County District Attorney

The following summarizes some of the notable findings.

#### School Suspension

**58 percent of respondents who were suspended in elementary school dropped out of high school, compared to a lower dropout rate of 47 percent among those who were not suspended.** Suspension also appears to be linked to teenage arrest rates. Among those who were suspended in middle school, 58 percent were arrested as a juvenile and 48 percent were arrested and found guilty as a juvenile, compared with only 40 and 33 percent, respectively, of the respondents





## **HON. DAVID W. SUNDAY JR.**

**DISTRICT ATTORNEY, YORK COUNTY, PA**

I'll never forget a double murder I once prosecuted. The defendant was barely 18 years old when he walked up to a car and pumped an entire magazine of bullets into the two brothers inside. At sentencing, the victims' family packed one side of the courtroom. On the other side, there was only the defendant and his lawyer.

What led him to that solitary place? We don't know, but if we care about public safety, we must ask: At what point can we do something to prevent what I saw in that courtroom—the losses, really, of three lives?

We can find that point in early childhood. It's at the root of every public-safety issue confronting our communities—substance abuse, mental health, the daily drumbeat of crime.

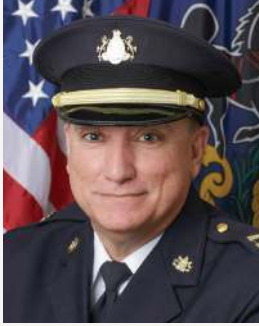
The criminal justice system can't rebuild lives shattered by crime. I am tremendously proud of the prosecutions my team conducts, but the community remains less safe every day that crime is occurring. It's a lesson I learned as York County rallied around innovations addressing the core causes of the opioid crisis.

Quality early childhood education is a piece that fits perfectly in the prevention puzzle, delivering much more than academic fundamentals. Its true power comes from instilling executive functioning—those basic life skills such as showing up, listening, following directions and treating others with respect that are essential to functioning in society.

Children who lack these lessons are left to their own devices, and we all suffer the consequences. There is a direct correlation between growing up without structure to the criminal activity children engage in for the rest of their lives.

Every day, I hate seeing the tragic effects of crime, and I hate seeing lost opportunity—the doctors, judges, and scientists who might have been. If we truly care about public safety, we must invest all the time, money, and expertise possible in helping children. Quality early childhood education will, without fail, decrease crime and prepare children for success. Here in York County and throughout Pennsylvania, our investments in young children will help them achieve their full potential and make our communities safer.

**“If we truly care about public safety, we must invest all the time, money, and expertise possible in helping children. Quality early childhood education will, without fail, decrease crime and prepare children for success.”**



## JOHN F. GARDNER

CHIEF OF POLICE, STATE COLLEGE POLICE DEPARTMENT

When I was a juvenile probation officer, right out of college, I recognized that kids don't grow up on a level playing field. As I learned policing in State College from the ground up—first as a patrol officer and now 30 years later as Chief—I saw children exposed to negative behaviors in the home and caught in generational cycles of poverty, drug addiction, and domestic violence.

That's why I have always tried to be a positive influence on children, but law enforcement officers can only do so much. In addition to parents and many other influences, quality pre-kindergarten is vital in starting kids off on the right foot. In the first years of life, they are learning at an amazing rate. I saw it in the t-ball players I've coached, little 6- and 7-year-old sponges who soak up everything they see and hear whether we realize it or not.

Sadly, the only sense of normalcy for some of those kids was that hour or two on the field. I'd have to send them back to environments that weren't necessarily conducive to their well-being. In my professional life, I have seen two common results—growing up aimless or becoming aggressive and attention-seeking—both of which can lead to delinquency and later criminal behavior. Shared is a lack of self-worth and a belief that they can't be as academically successful as their peers and therefore they don't try.

I have seen kids rise above their disadvantages because a caring adult took an interest and taught them respect, starting with respect for themselves. For at-risk kids, especially, it must begin in early childhood, and quality pre-k is a crucial element. High-quality early learning helps children build a foundation of academic and social skills so they believe in themselves and are excited to continue learning.

High-quality pre-k is an investment in community because too many children fall through the cracks in getting on productive paths to success. It's an investment in lower crime rates, and every one of my officers will tell you that's what they want—even if it means fewer jobs for cops someday. As a society, our job's not done until we address each and every one of those kids, because there are no throwaway children.

**“High-quality early learning helps children build a foundation of academic and social skills so they believe in themselves and are excited to continue learning.”**

who were not suspended. Moreover, among those who were suspended in high school, 61 percent were arrested as a juvenile and 50 percent were arrested and found guilty, with both proportions being close to double the rates of participants who were not suspended, at 37 and 31 percent, respectively. **Lastly, 53 percent of respondents who were suspended in elementary school were placed in a residential juvenile justice program compared to 30 percent who were not suspended.**

### School Expulsion

**Among respondents who were expelled from school, 64 percent ultimately did not complete high school compared to a 45 percent high school incompleteness rate among participants who were not expelled.** Moreover, 59 percent of expelled students were arrested as a juvenile, 53 percent were arrested and found guilty, and 49 percent were placed in a residential juvenile justice program, compared to 42 percent, 34 percent, and 29 percent among prisoners who were not expelled.

### Academics

**Having difficulty reading in elementary school is associated with trouble later in life, given that among respondents who experienced this difficulty, 50 percent were arrested as juveniles, 42 percent were arrested and found guilty, and 38 percent were placed in a residential juvenile justice program, compared to 44, 36, and 30 percent, respectively, among those who did not have difficulty reading.** Moreover, among those who had difficulty reading, 65 percent were suspended and 33 percent were expelled, compared to a 51 percent suspension rate and 15 percent expulsion rate among those who did not have difficulty reading. Having difficulty reading is also associated with participants'

academic experience, as 76 percent of those with difficulty reading skipped school, and 34 percent got in trouble in elementary school, compared to 59 and 24 percent, respectively. **Family involvement may have had an impact on respondents' academic success, as those who had someone involved in their learning had lower rates of dropping out of school (47 percent) and having difficulty reading in school (20 percent), compared to those who did not have anyone involved in their learning (55 and 29 percent, respectively).**

### Family Substance Use Disorder

Having a family member who had a substance use disorder is associated with myriad negative later-in-life outcomes. **Among respondents in this category, 56 percent were arrested as juveniles, 47 percent were arrested and found guilty, compared to 40 and 33 percent, respectively, among those who did not have any substance use disorder in their family.** Moreover, 69 percent of participants with family substance use disorder were suspended in school, with 41 percent being suspended in middle school and 46 percent being suspended in high school, compared to 49, 27, and 31 percent, respectively, among respondents who did not have any substance use issues in the family. Additionally, 34 percent got in trouble in elementary school and 26 percent were expelled from school, compared to 23 percent and 17 percent, respectively, among prisoners who did not have any substance use disorder in the family.

### It All Adds Up

No baby is destined, at birth, to become involved in crime. The road to criminal behavior is paved with such challenges as poverty, childhood abuse and neglect,



inadequate preparation for school, unaddressed behavior problems, poor academic performance, and dropping out of high school. The path to success in life is driven by school readiness, the ability to get along with others, academic achievement, and high school graduation. Pennsylvania needs to continue building on its investments in high-quality pre-k to ensure that more children have the opportunity for quality early education and care to help them become successful and law-abiding members of society. Of course, pre-k is not a “silver bullet” that can protect against all future challenges, including criminal activity, which is also committed by people who have faced few, if any, foundational impediments. Unfortunately, too many children face a myriad of disadvantages that can be difficult to overcome, as well as systemic disparities in the criminal justice

system that places some groups at even further disadvantage.

## **Supporting parents**

The most successful early childhood programs with long-term results—such as the Perry Preschool, Chicago Child-Parent Centers, and New Jersey’s state pre-k—work with parents to support them in reinforcing positive behaviors and encourage them to routinely read and speak to their children so they are better prepared for success in the years to come.

Parents are their children’s first and most important teachers. However, some parents in challenging circumstances need support to bolster their children’s development. High-quality early childhood programs partner with parents to help them foster their children’s academic and behavioral development.

## **Quality is Key**

Results from New Jersey, North Carolina, and Michigan should effectively end the debate on whether high-quality state pre-k efforts can be brought to scale and deliver strong and lasting results. To attain lasting results, programs must be high quality. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation describes 15 research-based “essential elements of high-quality pre-k” that move beyond program inputs to examine what actually happens in the classroom, particularly the quality of teacher-child interactions and teacher instruction.<sup>30</sup> The heart of any program is the interaction between the teacher and the child. To be able to deliver an evidence-based curriculum that supports all aspects of children’s development: cognitive, physical, social and emotional, teachers must be well-trained and receive quality, ongoing professional development training. They also must be fairly and appropriately

compensated to reduce turnover and create a more stable workforce.

The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) maintains a checklist of program features that support quality, focusing on teacher credentials and training, class size, teacher-child ratios, learning standards, screening and other services, and program oversight. Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts meets 8 of 10 NIEER benchmarks for quality, while the Pennsylvania Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program meets 6 of 10.<sup>31</sup>

### **Pennsylvania Must Expand Access to Pre-k**

There are 170,216 children ages 3 and 4 who are eligible for Pennsylvania’s publicly-funded pre-k programs. Of those, 101,806 (60 percent) do not have access to high-quality, publicly funded pre-k.<sup>32</sup> They are missing out on the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that will provide a solid foundation for future learning as well as the aforementioned benefits that high-quality pre-k is shown to provide.

### **Demonstrated Economic Benefits**

A well-respected, independent cost-benefit analysis of nearly 20 different studies of high-quality pre-k programs showed that pre-k can return, on average, a “profit” (economic benefits minus costs) to society of more than \$27,000 for every child served. Applying these benefits to the approximately 32,000 children who are currently served by Pre-K Counts and the Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program, Pennsylvania could realize a return of about \$864 million over the lifetime of these children. These economic benefits accrue due largely to reductions in the cost of future crime and increases in participants’ future wages, as well as decreases in other costs to society, such as children being held back in school or receiving special education. These benefits would accrue for each new cohort of children served by high-quality pre-k. Clearly, pre-k works and more than pays for itself.

### **Conclusion**

As law enforcement leaders, our job is to ensure public safety in Pennsylvania. **We all agree that a better and less expensive way to stop crime going forward is to put as many young children as possible on the path to success.**

Pennsylvania’s law enforcement leaders urge policymakers to invest further in improving access to our state’s Pre-K Counts program and Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program. If Pennsylvania continues to invest wisely in quality pre-k opportunities for its disadvantaged children, thousands of children can become successful, productive adults. When we support what works for our children, we put them—and our state—on an improved and safer path. We must continue to invest in what works.

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