



Quality Early Childhood Education (ECE) A Critical Investment in Pennsylvania's Future

As we prepare for the budget years ahead, we are at a critical juncture.

We have to use our scarce resources more wisely. PA QUEST urges all legislators to speak out about the scientific logic, the fiscal prudence, the social foresight, and the moral imperative of investing in our youngest children.



We represent 9157 child care programs (centers, groups and family homes) serving 361,355 children in families across the state. This collaboration supports increased funding for programs that support ECE, with the goals of:

- Improving educational outcomes for children,
- Allowing low-income families to find jobs and stay employed, and
- Providing livable wage jobs for the early childhood care and education workforce.

Short-term benefits of investing in high quality early childhood education

- savings in education costs, cutting the need for grade retention and special education programs;
- a more stable and productive workforce, since 24% of employee absences are due to family/child care issues;
- gains for low-income mothers in health, schooling and earnings, and decreased child abuse;
- local economic multipliers, with more than \$2 circulating in the local economy for every \$1 invested in early childhood.

Long-term benefits, as shown in forty years of research across the country, include reduced crime, higher education levels, and higher employment and earnings for participants in high quality early education programs, with calculation of returns ranging from 3% to 17%.

Benefits for all children (research data available)

- Over 80% of all children participating in PA Pre-K Counts met critical early school success competencies at transition to kindergarten, dramatically reducing the historical special education placements rates in their school districts, from 18% to 2.4%.

- Early childhood is the time to intervene. Of 50 children who have trouble reading in first grade, 44 of them will still have trouble in fourth grade.
- Pre-school programs boost children's skills regardless of their economic background, with sustained improvements in reading, writing, mathematics, and social skills.

PA Voters Overwhelmingly Support Investments in ECE (detailed poll summary available)

- Over four in five PA voters (81%) support providing early childhood education to all children in PA.
- Voters in all regions of the state favor ECE by large majorities – 78% in the West, 82% in the Southeast, and 81% in the "T".
- Voter support translates into favoring government investment – 71% in favor, 26% opposed.

As is the case with K-12 education, funding for ECE comes from several state and federal sources, listed below. Despite increased state commitment, demand for all these programs far exceeds the supply.

- **Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts:** free high quality pre-k to targeted three and four year olds
- **Keystone STARS:** the state's Quality Rating Improvement System
- **Child Care Works:** financial subsidy to pay a portion of child care costs for low-income working families
- **Head Start (Federal and State Supplemental):** free, comprehensive early learning services
- **Nurse Family Partnerships:** helps low-income first-time mothers promote healthy child development.
- **Early Intervention:** services to meet the unique needs of children with developmental delays



Programs That Fund ECE

Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts: Reaches 11,841 students, through 155 agencies in 62 counties (08-09); received \$86,412,000 in state appropriations for 09-10, level funding.

- Provides free high quality pre-k to three and four year olds, targeting those at risk of school failure. (Just 20% of the Commonwealth's 299,500 three and four year olds have access to high-quality, publicly-funded Pre-K.)
- Benefits: children who attend high quality pre-K programs enter kindergarten with better language, reading, math and social skills; they have higher standardized test scores and higher graduation rates.

Keystone STARS: Reaches 107,546 children under age five, through 4282 child care programs in all 67 counties (5/09)

- The state's Quality Rating Improvement System, providing financial incentives and support for Head Start and child care programs to improve quality, moving from a 1 to 4 STAR level based on quality standards. Approximately 3% of children under age five are served in STAR 3 and 4 programs, which are recognized as high quality.
- Benefits: On the basis of nationally-accepted benchmarks, Keystone STARS providers have shown impressive gains in classroom scores and reversed a decade-long trend of declining quality in early childhood programs.

Child Care Works: Reaches 60,402 children under age five (8%). Children ages five to 12 also received subsidy, for a total of 116,805 children (6/09). 9950 Pennsylvania children are on the waiting list.

- Provides financial subsidy to help pay for child care for families who earn 200% of the federal poverty level or less and meet certain work requirements.
- Benefits: Low income mothers whose children participated in high quality child care experienced more stable employment and higher earnings.

Together, Keystone STARS and Child Care Works (combined as Child Care Services) received \$193,871,000 in 09-10; the \$22.2 million increase over last year came from federal economic stimulus dollars.

Head Start, State and Federal: Reaches 35,311 children across all 67 counties in Pennsylvania, or 5% of all children under age five (07-08); received \$39,480,000 in state supplemental appropriations for 09-10, level funding.

- Free, comprehensive early learning services; families earning 130% of the federal poverty level or less are eligible.
- Benefits: According to longitudinal data, Head Start narrows the gap between disadvantaged children and all children in vocabulary and writing skills in pre-school, and leads to continued improvements relative to other children during the kindergarten year.

Nurse-Family Partnership: Reaches 4,179 children in 38 of the 67 counties, or 1% of the infants and toddlers in Pennsylvania; received \$11,978,000 in state appropriations for 09-10, \$2 million more than last year, but just enough to maintain the program at its current level.

- Provides registered nurses to help low-income first-time mothers learn how to promote healthy
- Benefits: NFP prevents abuse and neglect of at-risk children. By the time participating children reach age 15, they and their mothers experience about 60% fewer arrests than those not in the program.

Early Intervention: Reaches more than 33,900 infants and toddlers, and 43,800 preschoolers; received \$304 million for 09-10, level funded with the help of federal dollars.

- Offers individualized services to meet the unique needs of children with developmental delays
- Benefits: 99% of children made progress from entrance to exit. 78% substantially increased their rate of growth, and over half who exited as preschoolers functioned within age expectations (12/09).

Bi-Partisan Commitment to ECE

Recognizing the implications for Pennsylvania's competitiveness, Governor Mark Schweiker commissioned a bipartisan task force in 2002 to study how to improve the quality of early learning. Their recommendations became the basis for Keystone STARS, Head Start Supplemental Assistance, and Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts. Pennsylvania is now seen as a leader in the nation in its early childhood system.

What it means to be an ECE champion

- Stay in touch with ECE programs and advocates in your district;
- Demonstrate an understanding of the programs, issues, and research;
- Vote, as possible, for improvements in quality and affordability in ECE;
- Support a budget that offers more young children a more high quality early childhood experience;
- Communicate with colleagues about the importance of supporting such a budget.

