



AN INITIATIVE OF

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FAST FACTS



High-Quality, Accessible Pre-K

"Increasing access to high-quality Pre-K is not only the smart thing to do, it's the right thing to do. Raising lifetime wages (and thereby tax revenues) and reducing the likelihood that children will drop out of school, get involved in crime and become a burden on the justice system more than make up for the costs of early education."

— John E. Pepper, Jr,
former Chairman and
CEO, Proctor and Gamble,
and chairman of the
Walt Disney Company,
and James Zimmerman,
former chairman and
chief executive of Macy's

What is high-quality, accessible Pre-Kindergarten?

High-quality, accessible Pre-Kindergarten provides access to early educational experiences to all children within a jurisdiction regardless of their families' ability to pay. The benefits of Pre-K—for children, families, and society at large—are inextricable from the quality of the program. Many components go into ensuring a quality early education, from adequate student to teacher ratios to class size limits, teacher qualifications to professional development, and a continuous improvement system that ensures strong teaching practices. The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), based at Rutgers University, has established a list of ten policy benchmarks of Pre-K quality it uses in an annual assessment of state programs.¹ CityHealth partners with NIEER to apply these benchmarks in its assessment of city early education offerings. In addition to these basic standards, Pre-K programs must also be adequately funded and supported by educational leadership.

How does high-quality Pre-K improve the lives of city residents?

High-quality Pre-K has been rigorously proven to improve school readiness and academic achievement, and to reduce grade retention (i.e. students being held back) and needs for special education later on—especially for low-income children who may not have access to supportive environments at home.² The cognitive and social emotional gains children get from quality Pre-K are associated with improved health in adulthood.³

High-quality Pre-K programs are a wise financial investment. Nobel Prize winning economist James Heckman estimates a \$7–\$10 return on investment for every dollar spent on Pre-K.⁴

Quality preschool education can benefit middle-class children as well as disadvantaged children; typically developing children as well as children with special needs; and dual language learners as well as native speakers. While evidence shows that low-income children and those with special needs benefit most from high-quality early education, middle-class children can benefit substantially if the educational content is of high-quality, and the benefits still outweigh the costs for children from all income levels.^{5,6}

Preschool participants are more likely to go to a doctor, receive appropriate immunizations and screenings, and get dental care.³

As 65% of mothers with children under age six are in the labor force,⁷ many city and county leaders see an additional benefit in preschool programs—helping accommodate working parents’ needs for child care.⁸

What is the evidence that universal Pre-K programs work?

The Community Preventive Services Task Force recommends center-based early childhood education programs (ECE) to improve educational outcomes that are associated with long-term health as well as social- and health-related outcomes.⁹ According to the Task Force, the benefits from students’ future earnings gains alone exceed program costs.

The benefits of Pre-K are long-lived: while some of the early gains children experience from Pre-K even out as they progress through school, strong evidence shows long-term effects on important societal outcomes such as increased likelihood of high school graduation, years of education completed, and earnings, and reduced likelihood of involvement in crime and teen pregnancy.⁵

What are some future policy issues to consider?

For cities, one of the most significant questions when it comes to Pre-K is how to pay for it. While many cities are creatively braiding funding from the state and federal levels, a select few have been able to create dedicated, sustained local funding for early education. These cities use a variety of mechanisms to pay for Pre-K, including sales taxes, property taxes and set-asides, social impact bond programs, family fees, and federal Title I dollars. In Philadelphia, a soda tax passed in 2017 is paying for the city’s investment in expanding access to its Pre-K program. In Seattle, voters passed a property tax levy in November 2018 to continue funding the city’s high-quality preschool program for an additional seven years. Each of these different strategies requires political will from city leadership and buy-in from city residents.

RESOURCES FOR CITIES ON IMPLEMENTING HIGH-QUALITY PRE-K PROGRAMS

American Institutes for Research *Ten Questions Local Policymakers Should Ask About Expanding Access to Preschool*

Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes, *Why Quality Matters in Pre-K* This collection of one-pagers briefly explains the key elements of high-quality Pre-K.

NIEER, *Implementing 15 Essential Elements for High-quality: A State and Local Policy Scan* The report explores the extent to which states and three large cities support high-quality state-funded preschool education.

NIEER, *Early Childhood Education: Three Pathways to Better Health* The brief presents the multiple pathways through which early childhood education programs can contribute to better health, in both the short and long term.

NIEER, *Improving Public Financing for Early Learning Programs* The brief reviews sources and models of public financing of early care and education.

Ready Nation, *Business Case for Early Childhood Investments* A factsheet that makes the business case for greater access to early education.

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CityHealth will regularly evaluate cities on the number and strength of their policies. <http://www.cityhealth.org/>