

## High-Quality, Accessible Pre-Kindergarten

Early childhood education is an essential step to access real opportunities later in life — from successfully graduating high school to staying healthy. It also provides parents a safe place for kids to learn, play, and grow. When all families have access to high-quality pre-K, more children have the opportunity to succeed as they begin their educational journeys.

### The Quality Pre-K Challenge

- Less than half (48%) of children in poverty are school-ready at 5 years old, compared with 75% of children from moderate- or high-income households.<sup>1</sup>
- Not all pre-K programs meet high-quality standards. The National Institute of Early Education Research (NIEER) has identified ten quality standards benchmarks that identify the minimum policies needed to support optimal child outcomes. Additional equity-focused policies for cities include access, demographic data collection, and a city's own dedicated local revenue source.<sup>2</sup>
- While the number of local pre-K programs is growing, many high-quality programs are reaching too few children. CityHealth in collaboration with NIEER has set a minimum threshold for enrollment of at least 30 percent of the population of preschoolers.

### A Healthy Solution: High Quality Accessible Pre-K

- **Provides a healthy start in life** — Children in high-quality, accessible pre-K programs are more likely to go to a doctor, receive immunizations and screenings, and access dental care.<sup>3</sup>
- **Sets children up for long-term success** — Participation in high-quality pre-K programs leads to increased high school graduation rates and higher earnings, and provides linkages to early intervention and reductions in crime and teen pregnancy.<sup>3</sup>
- **Provides a safe place for children** — When designed as part of a comprehensive early care and educational system, pre-K programs provide working parents a safe place for their children; this matters because 68% of mothers with children under age 6 work.<sup>4</sup>
- **Pays long-term dividends** — High-quality, accessible pre-K programs are a wise financial investment, with one leading economist estimating a return of \$7-\$10 for every dollar spent.<sup>5</sup>

### **What is the Evidence that High-Quality, Accessible Pre-Kindergarten Policies Can Improve Health?**

Pre-K benefits children and their families over their lifetimes, but there also is significant return on investment over time for cities that support excellent, accessible pre-K programs. Additionally, the programs benefit the workforce by helping accommodate working parents' needs for childcare.<sup>4,6</sup>

- A review of 22 studies of the effects of early childhood education programs concluded that children who participate in these programs, such as Head Start or universal pre-K, are less likely to repeat a grade or to be placed in special education.<sup>7</sup>
- The review also determined that children who attend preschool also are more likely to graduate high school<sup>7,8</sup> and a summary of research on the effects of early education programs found that children who attend preschool have better health.<sup>9</sup> They were also found to have higher earnings as adults according to a cost-benefit analysis of the High/Scope Perry Preschool Study which analyzed observations of participants through age 40.<sup>10</sup>
- Participation in pre-K programs has also been associated with lower rates of crime later in life by the same study,<sup>10</sup> as well as teen parenthood in a longitudinal study on the long term effects of Head Start programs on more than 3,000 children.<sup>11</sup>
- The Washington State Institute for Public Policy analyzed long-term returns of state and district pre-K programs for children from low-income families, and found a net benefit to taxpayers, participants, and others of about \$13,144 per child, compared to a cost of \$3,475 per child.<sup>12</sup>
- The same study also looked at universal early childhood education programs and Head Start, and found that both had a 70% chance or better of the benefits exceeding the costs.<sup>12-14</sup>

### **How Can High-Quality, Accessible Pre-Kindergarten Help Address Health Disparities?**

High-quality pre-K policies ensure all children can access the benefits of a strong preschool program regardless of race or socioeconomic status. Such programs have proven especially beneficial for low-income students, as well as children who are dual language learners.<sup>15-18</sup>

- Hispanic children in the U.S. may benefit most significantly from greater access to high-quality pre-K programs; they are, on average, less likely to be enrolled in pre-school programs than their Black and white counterparts.<sup>19</sup>

- Pre-K access is related to direct medical care as well. As mentioned above, a review of the literature showed that preschool participants are more likely to go to a doctor, have age-appropriate immunizations and screenings, and receive dental care.<sup>3</sup>

### What Are Some Future Issues to Consider?

Stable, long-term funding will help ensure more children and families have access to high-quality pre-K programs. Some cities have created dedicated, sustained local funding sources for early education, while most cities make use of state and federal funding sources. Local funding can come through a variety of mechanisms, including sales taxes, property taxes, private donations, and tuition. These local funding mechanisms most often rely on political will from city leadership and buy-in from city residents.

### Resources for Cities

National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER): Annual State of Preschool Yearbook.

<https://nieer.org/state-preschool-yearbooks>

Society for Research in Child Development: Research briefs.

<https://www.srcd.org/research/briefs-fact-sheets>

Center for American Progress: State and Local Early Learning Examples.

<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/news/2020/12/09/493515/state-local-wins-illustrate-national-demand-early-learning-investments/>

American Institutes for Research: Ten Questions Policy Makers Should Ask About Expanding Access to Preschool. <https://www.air.org/resource/brief/ten-questions-local-policymakers-should-ask-about-expanding-access-preschool>

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