

# Early Education in Kentucky

Preschool helps children succeed in school and prepares them for productive lives

## Overview

Businesses in Kentucky need employees who are not only well-educated, but also job-ready, productive, and team-capable. Yet many Kentucky businesses are currently hard pressed to find such workers, because too many young adults don't have the necessary education or skills.

It's easier to give kids a solid start when they're young than it is to help them catch up later on. That's why high-quality early education is essential for ensuring Kentucky's children don't show up at kindergarten already behind. High-quality early education will help them succeed in school so they can become a part of the effective workforce Kentucky needs to be competitive.

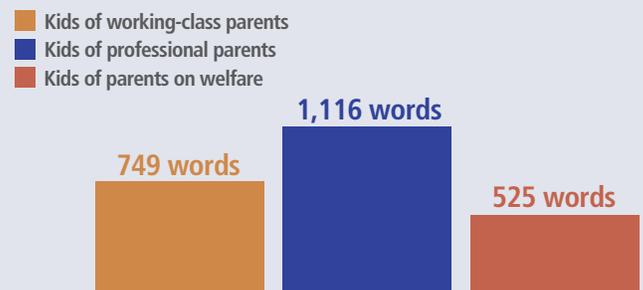
## Why early education matters

The first five years of life are a time of rapid brain development for children. One study demonstrated that by age three, children who had professional parents had vocabularies that were 50 percent larger than children of working-class parents and twice as large as those with parents on welfare.<sup>1</sup>

By kindergarten, disadvantaged children are already as much as 18 months behind their peers.<sup>2</sup> Many of these children never

## Parents play an essential role in shaping their kids' vocabularies

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Source: "The early catastrophe" Hart, B. & Risley, T. R., Education Review (2004).

## WHO WE ARE

ReadyNation is the nation's preeminent business leader organization working to strengthen business through effective policies for children and youth. It operates under the umbrella of the non-profit Council For A Strong America. Our more than 1,400 members educate policymakers and the public about effective investments that will help businesses compete in today's global marketplace by helping children get on the right track to succeed in school and in life. Our members have contributed to victories for children at the federal level and in dozens of states.

catch up, and are at an increased risk of dropping out of high school.<sup>3</sup> In fact, 60 to 70 percent of the achievement gap in high school is already there at kindergarten entry.<sup>4</sup> We need to make sure that these children don't start out behind so they stay in school and have the opportunity to become the workers business requires.

## **Kentucky children are falling behind in school**

Like the rest of the country, the vast majority of school-age children in Kentucky aren't performing at grade level. Of Kentucky's fourth graders, only 47 percent are proficient or above in math and 50 percent are proficient or above in reading. The state's eighth graders are in comparable shape—a meager 33 percent are proficient or above in math and 40 percent are proficient or above in reading.<sup>5</sup>

In addition, more than 12 percent of Kentucky high school students don't graduate on time.<sup>6</sup> This is not good news considering that by 2020, 62 percent of jobs in Kentucky will require at least some post-secondary education. Only 54 percent of Kentucky's workers currently have achieved that level of education.<sup>7</sup>

## **Early education helps children do well in school, while preparing them for success in the workforce**

Fortunately, there is a solution: high-quality early education will help prepare Kentucky's children for not only their immediate future, but also for the workforce and their adult lives. While some families have a stay-at-home parent who can provide instruction, the majority of families have

## **The Short- and Long-Term Benefits of Preschool**

### **Preschool increases success in school**

- At-risk four-year olds who attended quality, public preschool in Kentucky scored four to seven percentage points higher on reading and math assessments by third and fourth grades when compared to kids who didn't attend.<sup>8</sup>
- Children who attended New Jersey's state preschool program at ages three and four were three-fourths of a year ahead in math and two-thirds of a year ahead in reading by the fourth and fifth grades, when compared to children who did not participate.<sup>9</sup>
- These results are important: preschoolers' math knowledge has been shown to predict later school success, into elementary and even high school. It even predicts later reading achievement better than early reading skills.<sup>10</sup>

### **Early education can help more students graduate**

- Children who participated in Chicago's Child-Parent Centers preschool program were 29 percent more likely to graduate from high school.<sup>11</sup>
- Children who participated in Michigan's state preschool program had a 35 percent increase in high school graduation.<sup>12</sup>

### **Early education can even lead to college and career success**

- At-risk children who attended the Abecedarian early learning program in North Carolina were four times more likely to graduate from a four-year college.
- They were also 42 percent more likely to be employed consistently as adults than those who did not attend.<sup>13</sup>

both or the only parent in the workforce—so it's crucial that these children have a strong early learning opportunity.<sup>14</sup> In Kentucky, 64 percent of children under the age of six have all available parents in the workforce.<sup>15</sup>

### **Early education has a strong return on investment**

Early education programs have been shown to have both short- and long-term economic impacts.<sup>16</sup> For instance, a well-respected independent cost-benefit analysis that examined the results of more than 20 different studies of state and local preschool programs found that high-quality preschool can have, on average, a net return of nearly \$30,000 for every child served.<sup>17</sup>

### **Kentucky's preschool program**

Currently, only 26 percent of four-year olds in Kentucky are enrolled in the state's public preschool program and another 14 percent are enrolled in Head Start.<sup>18</sup> Thus, we still have a way to go to improve access for our youngest learners. The state program meets nine of the 10 minimum requirements for program structure to support quality established by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER).

### **Invest in early education to strengthen Kentucky's economy**

As business leaders, we know that a quality education is essential to success in life. We can't let our youngest learners start from behind. An investment in Kentucky's youngest learners is a solid investment in our state's ability to compete.



**“Today, many businesses in Kentucky struggle to find employees with the right knowledge and skills. We need to act now to invest in early education so our youngest Kentuckians—our future workforce—will have the preparation they need for the jobs of tomorrow.”**

— Dave Adkisson, President & CEO,  
Kentucky Chamber of Commerce

## Endnotes

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