

Police Chiefs, Sheriffs, Prosecutors, and Violence Survivors: “Preschool Works”

Law enforcement leaders advocating for 25 years to improve public safety through early education



Acknowledgements

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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

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2.5 million more preschool seats needed to serve all children from low-income families

Summary

Law enforcement leaders understand 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. For this reason, since 1996, Fight Crime: Invest in Kids members have advocated for investments in policies and programs that put kids on the path toward productive lives. In particular, by providing access to high-quality early education for kids today, we can see less crime and incarceration in the future, while reaping economic and societal benefits.

In 1996, in response to rising crime levels and the 1994 federal Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act that focused on responding to crime, a group of advocates, law enforcement leaders (including former Attorney General Elliott Richardson), and crime survivors came together to consider

strategies to prevent criminal behavior. The group, having seen the crime-reducing effects of the seminal Perry Preschool study, determined that quality early education would be among their priorities, and Fight Crime: Invest in Kids was born.

Over the past 25 years, we have seen great progress in increasing kids' access to preschool education, which research shows can improve academic performance—including high school graduation—and reduce the risk that participants will become involved in crime later. However, much work remains to be done, as a recent analysis demonstrated that it will take a concerted effort to serve all children from low-income families by 2040.

As we celebrate the 25th anniversary of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, members are calling on federal and state policymakers to ensure that more children from low-income families have access to high-quality

preschool. By bolstering access to quality early education, we will improve children's readiness to succeed in school and life, helping them to avoid crime, and enabling them to contribute to the strength of our nation.

“ I myself am the proud product of a Head Start program, and can attest to the lifelong benefits that come as a result of quality early education.”



Chief Mitchell Davis
Hazel Crest, IL Police
Department

High-quality early education helps prevent crime

Research shows that the experiences children have in their earliest years, during a period of critical brain growth, set the foundation for future development and success.¹ Voluntary, quality early education can put kids on a positive path in life, helping to prevent later crime. Decades of research, across numerous states and on the federal Head Start program, shows the short- and long-term benefits of high-quality preschool for children's development along several dimensions, particularly for children from families with low incomes.²

School readiness and success

- **Ready for school:** Boston's preschool program improved mathematics, literacy, and language skills among participating children equivalent to seven months of additional learning at kindergarten entry, compared with children who did not attend.³ State preschool programs and Head Start also report similar improvements in school readiness skills among children who attend.⁴
- **Not held back in school:** An evaluation of the Arkansas Better Chance preschool program found that attendees were less likely to be held back in school by the end of third grade than those who didn't attend any pre-K.⁵ State preschool programs in Michigan and New Jersey report similar results,⁶ as does the CAP Tulsa Head Start program.⁷
- **Increases in reading and math scores that persist:** A study of Alabama's pre-K program found that third- to seventh-graders from low-income families who had attended the program were more likely than their peers to be proficient in both reading and math.⁸ Children who participated in Georgia's state preschool program were about twice as likely to meet the state's standard for math achievement in seventh grade than non-participants.⁹ A study of the CAP Head Start program in Tulsa revealed positive effects on math test scores in eighth grade.¹⁰
- **High school graduation:** The Chicago Child-Parent Centers (CPC) pre-K reported a 29 percent increase in high school graduation rates among its participants.¹¹ Children who attended the Head Start program had an increased probability of graduating from high school, compared to their siblings who did not attend.¹² The fact that six out of 10

prisoners nationwide do not have a high school diploma illustrates the importance of education for crime prevention.¹³

Decreased behavior problems

Students who participated in Alabama's pre-K were about half as likely to have a behavioral infraction in school as non-participants; differences between the two groups were larger in middle school and high school, when the rates of infractions increased.¹⁴ Boys who participated in the Boston preschool program were less likely to be suspended from high school.¹⁵ The study comparing children who attended Head Start with their siblings who did not found that attendees had improved self control.¹⁶ Research has demonstrated a link between childhood behavior problems and later crime,¹⁷ underlining the importance of these findings.

Reduction in crime and incarceration

A smaller, but significant, number of long-term studies directly examine the link between preschool participation and crime prevention. Most recently, an MIT study of the Boston preschool program found that enrollees were less likely to have been incarcerated in a juvenile facility during high school, compared to non-enrollees.¹⁸ Children not served by the Chicago CPC early education program were 70 percent more likely to be arrested for a violent crime by age 18.¹⁹ By age 24, the people served by the CPC were 20 percent less likely to have served time in jail or prison.²⁰ A study of Oklahoma's preschool program found that it significantly decreased the likelihood that Black children were later charged with a misdemeanor or felony crime at age 18 or 19.²¹ Another analysis found that Black children who participated in Head Start were less likely to engage in crime in their early 20s.²²

Taken together, this research suggests that, by providing access to high-quality early education for kids today, we can see less crime and incarceration in the future. In fact, from 1996 to 2019, juvenile arrests fell dramatically, by 74 percent.²³ Official crime statistics for 2020 show an overall increase in crime, particularly violent crime, including homicide.²⁴ However, data show that overall juvenile arrests decreased in 2020.²⁵

Cost-benefit analyses of preschool programs have also demonstrated their positive return on investment, including through savings realized from crime reduction. For example, the Chicago CPC program had a return of nearly \$11 for every dollar spent, with the savings related to crime at approximately \$5 saved for every dollar invested.²⁶ Estimates suggest that state preschool programs for children from low-income families yield more than \$4 for

Fight Crime: Invest in Kids' Role in Establishing Mississippi Early Learning Collaboratives

In 2013, Mississippi joined every other southern state in providing state funding for high-quality early education when it approved \$3 million for its Early Learning Collaborative (ELC) preschool program. Fight Crime: Invest in Kids members played a major role in advocating for this investment, sending letters, meeting with lawmakers—including the governor—and publishing opinion pieces in important media outlets. The ELCs are high quality, meeting all 10 NIEER benchmarks. However, they currently serve just eight percent of Mississippi 4-year-olds, and per-child funding has dropped in recent years.

Access to early education has increased, but we must do more

The number of children attending early education programs has increased dramatically over the past 50+ years (see graph).²⁸ In 1965, when the federal Head Start program was founded, approximately 127,000 3- and 4-year-olds attended public preschool programs. Within a decade, that number had more than quadrupled. By 1990, more than one million children were enrolled in public preschool and, by 1995, the figure was more than two million children. Enrollment peaked in 2011 (at 2.9 million) and has been decreasing since. In 2019, there were 2.6 million 3- and 4-year-olds in public preschool. Across all programs (state-funded preschool, Head Start, and state special education), 44 percent of 4-year-olds and 17 percent of 3-year-olds were served.²⁹ **There were still 2.5 million children from low-income families without access to preschool programs.**

State-funded preschool programs

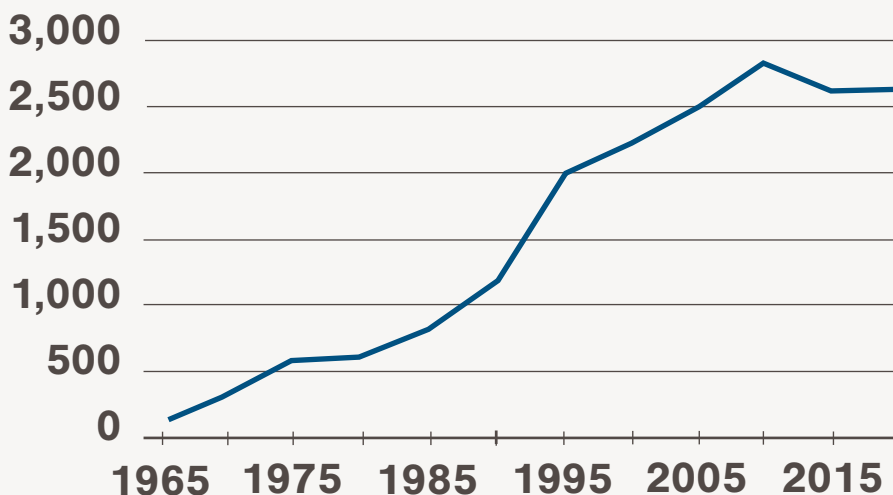
Looking specifically at state-funded preschool programs,³⁰ before 1980, only seven states offered these programs; by 1991, more than

Fight Crime: Invest in Kids Illinois

Fight Crime: Invest in Kids opened its first state office, in Illinois, in 1998. Five years later, our members helped win passage of legislation creating the state's Early Learning Council, a public-private partnership that has been central to helping expand and strengthen education services for young children. In 2006, Fight Crime: Invest in Kids members supported establishment of Illinois' landmark "Preschool for All" law, which set the goal of providing preschool for every 3- and 4-year old whose families wished to participate, prioritizing those most in need. In addition, our Illinois members helped lead 2009 and 2019 capital-campaign efforts that secured a total of \$145 million in construction and renovation funding for early childhood facilities.

Over the years, the voices of our law enforcement leaders have helped increase funding for the state's Early Childhood Block Grant—which supports pre-K as well as key, birth-to-3-programs—by over 350 percent. Nonetheless, with tens of thousands of youngsters still lacking services, substantial work in Illinois remains. With that in mind, Fight Crime: Invest in Kids members have recently contributed to bipartisan policy efforts at mapping long-term improvements in the funding adequacy, equity, reach and quality of the state's early childhood system.

Public Preschool Enrollment (in thousands)



Source: <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/school-enrollment/cps-historical-time-series.html>

half of the states (28) did so. A decade later, 40 states funded preschool programs. Most state preschool programs targeted children from families with low incomes or those who were at-risk for poor educational outcomes for other reasons. However, Georgia was the first state to offer free, universal preschool for all 4-year-olds, in 1995, followed by Oklahoma and New York (1998). Notably, two of these three pioneering universal preschool programs were established under Republican governors, reflecting the bipartisan support early education programs have enjoyed over the years.

The National Institute for Early Education's (NIEER) most recent preschool yearbook focused primarily on the school year 2019-2020, before the COVID-19 pandemic.³¹ At that point, 44 states and Washington, DC offered preschool programs. [States without preschool were: Idaho, Indiana, Montana, New Hampshire, South Dakota, and Wyoming.] More than 1.64 million children were enrolled, the majority (1.37 million) of whom were 4-year-olds. Current access also reflects bipartisan support, with the top states for access including: Vermont, Wisconsin, Florida, Oklahoma, and West Virginia.

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the educational experiences of preschoolers around the nation. Many preschool programs closed temporarily and some shifted children to online learning.³² Fall 2020 saw a 25 percent decline in overall enrollment, with children living in poverty having the steepest declines.³³ As children return to early education programs in fall 2021, they are likely to need additional support to reacclimate and to compensate for the learning opportunities lost during the pandemic.³⁴

Unfortunately, growth in preschool enrollment had already stalled prior to the pandemic.³⁵

Further, progress in enrolling additional children, as well as quality and funding, vary widely across states. Many states cut preschool funding during the Great Recession and programs in some states have not fully recovered. Most states do not offer full-day programs. Thus, although much progress has been made, more must be done to ensure that all children from low-income families get the quality preschool they need to arrive at school ready to learn and set them up for success in life. In fact, NIEER estimates that, even with robust federal and state investments, it will take approximately 20 more years, to 2040, to provide the additional 2.5 million preschool seats needed to serve all children from low-income families.³⁶

Federal and state policymakers must increase access to early education

Given the myriad benefits of high-quality early education programs, including crime prevention, federal and state policymakers must work in a bipartisan manner to increase access to these programs, particularly for children from families with low incomes. Investments must ensure the various programs are working together to provide families

“I’m the Guy You Pay Later” Campaign

In 2013, Fight Crime: Invest in Kids launched a national campaign, “I’m the Guy You Pay Later,” in support of early education.³⁷ We released a national report, followed by state-specific reports in 18 states, arguing that policymakers must invest now in high-quality early education or pay more later in crime-related costs. The campaign garnered 170 media stories and reached an audience of 67 million people, contributing to increased investments in preschool programs.

with high-quality options that best meet their needs. Solutions must also address how a federal-state preschool system would interact with the child care system, which often relies on the tuition it receives from 3-and 4-year olds to counterbalance the higher cost of infant-and-toddler care.

Specifically, federal investments should:

- Fund states to establish and/or expand a mixed-delivery system of voluntary early education programs, with publicly-funded preschool slots offered in diverse settings in the community, including child care.³⁸ The system should emphasize choice for parents and include broader services that children and parents need, such as access to healthcare, social and developmental interventions, and nutrition education programs.
- Incentivize states to provide salary parity for preschool teachers in all settings, including public schools and community based options.
- Increase investments in Head Start, to ensure all eligible children have access

to full-day, school-year programs in their communities.

As Fight Crime: Invest in Kids continues to advocate for increased and sustainable investments in early education, the above considerations should be paramount.



State and federal policymakers need to prioritize early education so more kids can grow up to lead successful lives.”



Vernon Stanforth, Sheriff
Fayette County, OH Sheriff's Office

Conclusion

As the national conversation has shifted from a focus just on police response to crime, to providing resources to prevent crime from occurring in the first place, the law enforcement leaders of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids agree and have been at the forefront with this argument for 25 years. High-quality early education provides one of the best ways to set children on the path to success and help them avoid becoming involved in crime later. Decades of research, across a wide variety of states, have demonstrated that preschool works, contributing to its bipartisan support. By increasing school readiness and success, and decreasing problem behaviors, preschool provides a solid foundation, particularly for children who, due to the economic circumstances of their families, are at increased risk of not doing well in school. Although participation in early education has increased over the past several decades, progress has been slow and uneven, and too many children still lack access to this vital support. Federal policymakers should take advantage of this unique moment to address this shortcoming and partner with states to bolster the early education system, to reap economic and societal benefits, including increased public safety.

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