FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS
COUNCIL FOR A STRONG AMERICA
PENNSYLVANIA

BRIEF



Enhancing Public Safety Through Early Education

Increasing access to high-quality preschool programs will pay off for Pennsylvania

The law enforcement leaders of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids know that one of the best ways to keep children from becoming involved in crime later on is to make sure they have a foundation for success in their earliest years. By providing access to high-quality preschool education for young children today, Pennsylvania can see less crime and incarceration in the future, while reaping enormous economic and societal benefits. Pennsylvania policymakers must act now to help the Commonwealth realize these public safety benefits by increasing investments in high-quality early education to serve more children and to support programs in recruiting and retaining well-trained, adequately-compensated teachers.

High-quality early education helps prevent crime

Research demonstrates that the experiences children have in their earliest years, during the most critical period of brain growth, set the foundation for future development and success.[1] Voluntary, quality preschool education can improve academic performance—including high school graduation—and reduce the risk that participants will become involved in crime later. Decades of research, across numerous states and on the federal Head Start program, show the short- and long-term benefits of high-quality preschool for children's development, particularly for children from families with low incomes, who are likely to generate larger benefits.[2]

School readiness and success

Students who participated in Pennsylvania's Pre-K Counts program outperformed their peers in language and math skills in kindergarten, showing four to five months of additional learning.[3] Children who attend high-quality preschool are also less likely to be held back in school[4] and have higher reading and math scores.[5] Preschool

participants also have an increased probability of graduating from high school.[6] The fact that six out of 10 prisoners nationwide do not have a high school diploma illustrates the connection between education and crime prevention.[7]

Decreased behavior problems

Pennsylvania's Pre-K Counts Public-Private Partnership program (the precursor to the current Pre-K Counts program) cut—from 22 percent to 4 percent—the number of children at risk for problematic social and self-control behaviors.[8] This led to fewer of those children needing special education.

Reduction in crime and incarceration

Some long-term studies directly examine the link between preschool participation and crime prevention. A recent 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.[9] By age 24, people served by the Chicago Child-Parent Centers (CPC) early education program were 20 percent less likely to have served time in jail or prison.[10]

Increasing preschool access will yield economic benefits

An independent cost-benefit analysis of universal preschool programs showed that they can return, on average, a "profit" (economic benefits minus costs) to society of more than $15,000 for every child served. The benefits accrue due to increased test scores (associated with higher earnings in adulthood), as well as reduced costs to society from preventing children being held back in school or needing special education.[11] A previous cost-benefit analysis by the same researchers found that the "profit" increased to more than $22,000 per child served when preschool programs targeted children from families with low-incomes and the calculation included the programs' benefits due to crime reduction.[12]

> "Prioritizing resources for early learning programs will help put kids on the path to educational success while also making our communities safer and saving taxpayer dollars."



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Governor Wolf has proposed a $70 million increase to Pennsylvania's pre-k line items, with $60 million for Pre-K Counts and $10 million for state-funded Head Start. Roughly $27 million of that increase is slated to go toward approximately 2,300 new slots.

Applying the estimated per child net benefits to these approximately 2,300 additional children who would be served, **Pennsylvania could realize a return on investment of $50.6 million over the lifetime of these children.**[13] This is in addition to the millions already realized from the children currently served.

Preschool quality is also key

Early education programs can set children on a path to successful adulthood.



However, to achieve lasting results, programs *must* be high-quality. Research indicates that a well-qualified workforce is an essential, fundamental component of high-quality early childhood education. Highly-qualified teachers engage in warm, nurturing interactions with the children to support their development in all areas. Excellent teachers also provide developmentally-appropriate instruction in key pre-literacy, pre-math and other early academic skills.[14] To offer this high-quality experience, early childhood educators must be well-trained, both before they start teaching and once they are on the job through ongoing professional development.[15]

Adequate compensation is also key to attracting and retaining top talent.[16] But early childhood teachers typically earn substantially less than kindergarten teachers. In Pennsylvania, the annual mean wage for pre-k teachers is $31,850, compared to $66,200 for kindergarten teachers.[17]

Fortunately, the governor's proposal includes roughly $43 million for a rate increase for both Pre-K Counts and Head Start. These funds can be used to increase teacher compensation, to bolster the early education workforce, and enhance program quality.

Pennsylvania policymakers must act now to bolster investments in children

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. Pennsylvania policymakers should continue to increase investments in high-quality early education programs.

Endnotes

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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.

Council for a Strong America is a national, bipartisan nonprofit that unites membership organizations, including law enforcement leaders, retired admirals and generals, and business executives, that promote solutions ensuring that our next generation of Americans will be successful, productive members of society.

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