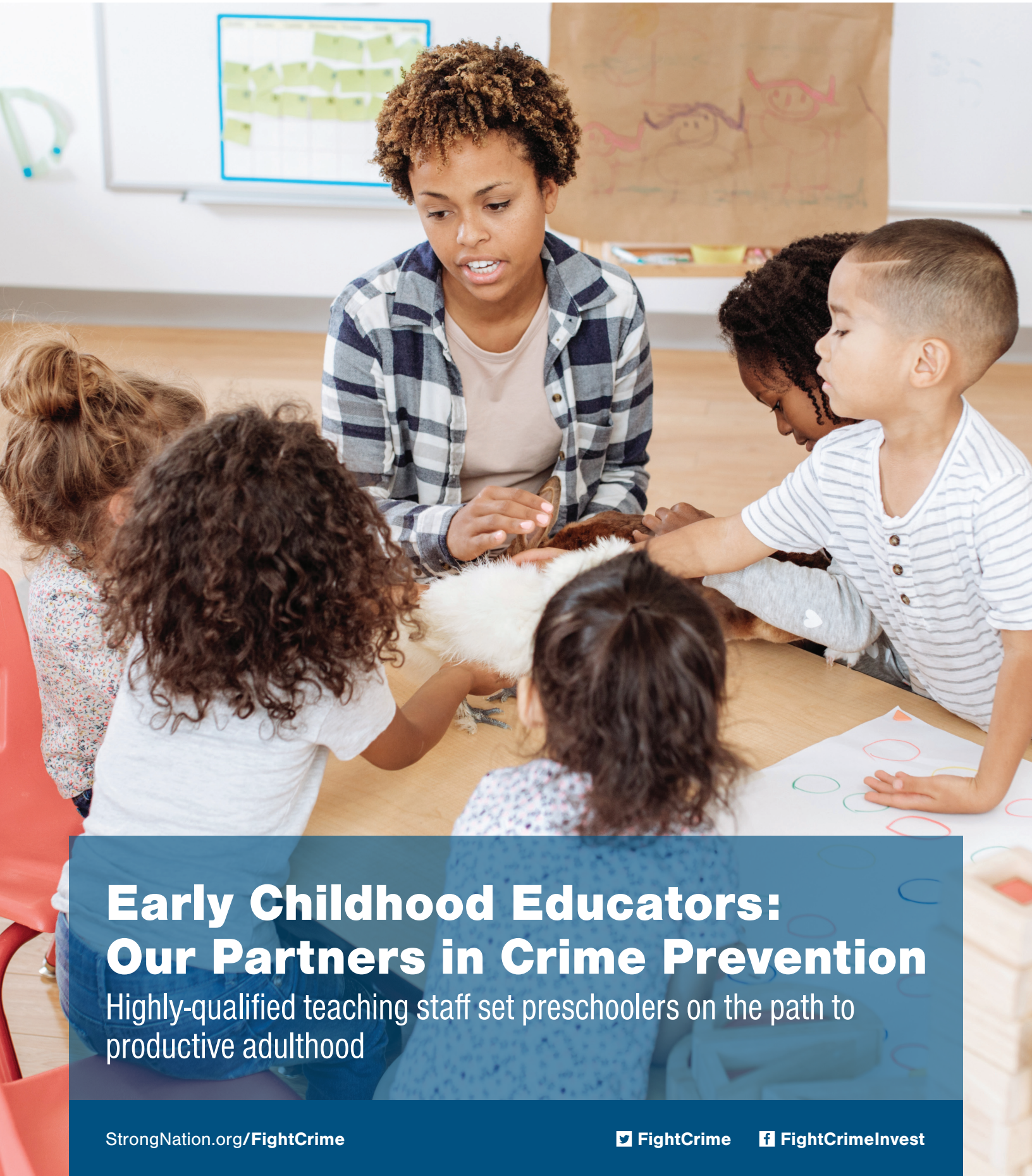
FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS
COUNCIL FOR A STRONG AMERICA

REPORT



Early Childhood Educators: Our Partners in Crime Prevention

Highly-qualified teaching staff set preschoolers on the path to productive adulthood

Acknowledgements

Council for a Strong America is a national, bipartisan nonprofit that unites five organizations comprised of law enforcement leaders, retired admirals and generals, business executives, pastors, and prominent coaches and athletes who promote solutions that ensure our next generation of Americans will be citizen-ready.

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.

Supported by tax-deductible contributions from foundations, individuals, and corporations.

We thank the W. Clement and Jessie V. Stone Foundation for their support for this report.

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November 2018

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Summary

The law enforcement members of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids recognize that high-quality early childhood education programs are a powerful way to give kids the right start in life and help them avoid becoming involved in later crime. Research backs up what law enforcement professionals have learned from experience. Studies show that at-risk kids who attend high-quality preschool programs are more likely to succeed in school and less likely to commit crimes as adults than similar children who do not attend such programs. To have a real impact, programs must be high quality in order to help children develop critical skills needed for success in school and life. Early education experts agree that high-quality preschool programs share certain key features, including highly-qualified teachers, developmentally-appropriate standards and curricula, appropriate teacher-child ratios, small class sizes, monitoring and quality-improvement systems, and screening and referral to needed services. Among the most fundamental of these program quality features are highly-qualified teachers: well-trained (both before and during their service) and well-compensated. Policymakers must address these components of workforce quality to ensure that early childhood education's crime prevention potential is achieved.

High-Quality Early Education: A Path to Less Crime

The path we set children upon, in their earliest years, can make a huge difference. Research has shown that high-quality early childhood education (ECE) can result in more successful outcomes, particularly for at-risk children from low-income families. This report focuses primarily on preschool and Head Start. In many states, preschool and childcare for younger children are distinct systems, with varying workforce and other requirements.

Better school performance

North Carolina's Smart Start and More at Four initiatives found that the children in counties that spent more per student were two months ahead in reading and 1.5 months ahead in math by fifth grade when compared with children in counties that spent less.[1] Participants in the Tulsa, Oklahoma Head Start program had higher achievement scores in math in seventh grade, compared to non-participants.[2]

Participants in Michigan's state pre-K were held back in school 51 percent less often than non-participants.[3] New Jersey, which has followed its state preschool children through the fourth and fifth grades, found its children were held back 40 percent less often.[4]

Fewer dropouts

The Chicago Child-Parent Centers (CPC) program reported a 29 percent increase in high school graduation rates among its participants.[5] Meanwhile, Michigan's pre-K program reported a 35 percent increase in graduates.[6] And an analysis of Head Start found that siblings who attended the program had an increased probability of graduating from high school, compared to their siblings who did not attend.[7] An economic study documented the relationship between high school graduation rates and crime, finding that a 10 percentage-point increase in graduation rates reduces murder and assault rates by about 20 percent.[8] Moreover, six out of 10 prisoners nationwide do not have a high school diploma.[9]

Less crime and fewer prisoners

Children *not* served by the Chicago CPC program were 70 percent more likely to be arrested for a violent crime by age 18.[10] By age 24, the people served by the Chicago CPC were 20 percent less likely to have served time in a jail or prison.[11] A recent study of Oklahoma's universal Pre-K program found the program decreased the likelihood that black children were later charged with a misdemeanor or felony crime at age 18 or 19.[12]

In sum, early childhood education programs can set children on a path to productive adulthood. However, to achieve lasting results, programs *must* be high quality.

Teachers Are the Foundation of High-Quality Early Childhood Education

The heart of any early childhood education program is the relationship between the teacher and the child.[13] Research indicates that a well-qualified workforce is an essential, fundamental component of high-quality early childhood education. Highly-qualified preschool teachers engage in warm, nurturing interactions with the children, to support their development in all areas, including social-emotional. Excellent teachers also provide developmentally-appropriate instruction in key pre-literacy, pre-math and other 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 attract and retain top talent.[16]

"Early childhood education sets children on a path to productive adulthood.

Key Elements of a Highly-Qualified Early Childhood Education Workforce

Education

The level of education required for ECE teachers has been a matter of long-standing debate. A National Research Council report in 2000 recommended that ECE teachers hold a bachelor's degree (BA), a recommendation echoed by its more recent report on "Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth to Age 8."[17] On the other hand, the National Association for the Education of Young Children's Power to the Profession initiative recently set an associate's degree in early childhood education as the entry-level standard for ECE teachers.[18] Much research, including a comprehensive review of 48 studies by the Campbell Collaboration, has found that higher teacher education levels have a strong relationship to higher quality in early childhood education.[19] However, findings on the importance of teachers having a bachelor's degree, per se, are mixed.[20]

In the context of this ongoing debate, 30 states currently require lead teachers in state-funded preschool programs to have bachelor's degrees.[21] Even in states that do not require it, many of these lead teachers have BAs. The federal Head Start program requires that half of all lead teachers have a BA; 75 percent meet that requirement.[22] However, nationwide, fewer than half (44 percent) of four-year-olds and only 16 percent of three-year-olds participate in state-funded preschool or Head Start.[23] Many more children attend private early education programs, where teacher training varies widely.

Professional development

The research around ongoing, in-service training for early education teachers offers more clarity than that on pre-service education.[24] Studies show that effective professional development is:

- **Classroom-focused:** related to what teachers are actually teaching;
- **Active:** allows for hands-on practice of skills
- **Collaborative:** with modelling and/or coaching of skills and feedback provided.

Unfortunately, despite the fairly consistent research, out in the field professional development for early childhood educators lacks consistency. For example, with regard to state-funded preschool, NIEER reports that only eight states meet its benchmark for quality professional development that consist of 15 hours of annual training, with some of it involving coaching or other hands-on support.[25]

Compensation

Adequate compensation is required to attract and retain a high-quality early childhood workforce.[26] This is particularly true when some states and Head Start are requiring teachers to obtain bachelor's degrees. But early childhood teachers earn substantially less than kindergarten teachers: their median hourly wage is $13.94, compared to $31.29 for kindergarten teachers (which equates to $28,990 annually versus $54,230).[27] Given the low wages in the field, between 2009 and 2013, more than one-third (34 percent) of preschool teachers had to rely on public assistance to meet the needs of their own families.[28] Teacher compensation tends to be highest in state-funded preschool or Head Start, compared to private, community-based settings, which serve a majority of children. However, even in state-funded preschool and Head Start, requirements for BAs have not been accompanied by proportionate increases in teacher compensation.[29]

The Path Forward for the Early Childhood Education Workforce

The discrepancy between the key elements required for a highly-qualified early childhood education workforce and the current state of affairs demands attention from state and federal policymakers. Given the research demonstrating that higher levels of teacher education are associated with higher quality ECE, policymakers should support efforts to increase the level of teacher education. Many different avenues exist to do so, ranging from ensuring that ECE teachers have access to Pell grants,[30] to increasing access to online teacher training programs,[31] to easing transitions from two- to four-year degree programs,[32] and beyond.

Concerning teacher professional development, policymakers should ensure that state and federal standards reflect the research on what components define effective in-service training and provide sufficient resources to attain those standards. With regard to compensation, achieving a highly-qualified, stable early education workforce will not happen without a focus on increasing teacher wages. A small number of states have instituted compensation parity policies that provide equal compensation for preschool and K-3 teachers with equivalent levels of education and experience.[33] Other states should do likewise and study the results.

To have maximum impact, each of the key elements must be addressed in a comprehensive strategy. This is essential, as the elements are interrelated; for example, if compensation remains low, teachers will have neither the means nor the incentive to obtain more education or pursue intensive professional development. Similarly, the type and amount of professional development required will vary depending on the level of teacher education.

North Carolina provides one example of a comprehensive approach.[34] The state implemented the Teacher Education and Compensation Helps (T.E.A.C.H.) Early Childhood Scholarship Program that provides scholarships to two- and four-year degree programs in early childhood education. Upon completion, T.E.A.C.H. participants receive a raise or bonus from their employers. The state also has a program, the Child Care WAGE$ Project, that rewards increases in education with additional salary. Although North Carolina requires all preschool teachers to have a BA, it offers flexibility in how teachers meet the requirement, through two pathways. Finally, the state provides parity on both salary and benefits for preschool and K-12 teachers with equal levels of education and experience. Multi-faceted strategies like those in North Carolina represent promising ways of building a well-qualified workforce, increasing ECE quality, and ultimately benefiting children.

Conclusion

High-quality early childhood education is a powerful means of crime prevention. However, this potential will only be realized with a highly-qualified early childhood workforce, with adequate education, ongoing professional development, and sufficient compensation. Policymakers must ensure that policies and resources support each of these components of workforce quality.

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