

High-Quality Early Childhood Programs are Key for a Strong New Mexico

Home visiting, child care, and preschool can help grow the economy, increase public safety, and enhance national security

High-quality early childhood programs can strengthen the current and future workforce, contribute to a strong economy and public safety, and enhance national security.

Research shows that experiences children have in their earliest years, during a period of critical brain growth, set the foundation for future development.¹ Children who experience warm, responsive parenting, and nurturing child care and preschool programs that stimulate their cognitive, social, and emotional development are set on a path to productive adulthood. Children who lack these quality environments early in life often arrive at school already behind their peers and may never catch up—underperforming in third grade reading and math, more likely to be held back in school, and less likely to graduate high school on time.

Children's early experiences also have consequences for our state and our nation. Our national security relies on qualified young adults who are ready, willing, and able to serve in the U.S. military. However, educational deficits, health issues, and behavior problems (substance abuse and crime) currently prevent 74 percent of New Mexico youth from qualifying for service.² New Mexico's jails are full of people serving time for serious and costly crimes, many of whom lack high school diplomas that would qualify them for legitimate employment.³

New Mexico's businesses need a steady supply of educated, skilled young people to build a strong workforce to compete in the global economy.

Early Childhood Policy Priorities for a Stronger New Mexico

Investments in New Mexico's children, beginning in the earliest years of their lives, can help ensure our state's future safety and productivity.

- 1. Support families through voluntary home visiting programs:** These programs pair a nurse or other trained professional with high-risk young families to provide parent education and support. However, 15 of New Mexico's 33 counties serve fewer than half of families who need home visiting.⁴ Home visiting can increase children's academic outcomes while reducing spending on costly social services.⁵ These

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programs also reduce child abuse, improve children's health, and help families dealing with substance abuse disorders.⁶

2. Grow access to high-quality early care and education: High quality early education programs provide a foundation for academic achievement, social competence, and ultimately, economic stability.⁷ Yet 53 percent of all New Mexico residents live in a child care “desert,” in which there are more than three times as many children as licensed child care slots.⁸ Only 31 percent of four-year-olds participate in the New Mexico

PreK program.⁹ To achieve high-quality, early childhood educators must be well-trained, before they start teaching and once they are on the job, and adequately compensated.¹⁰

High-quality home visiting, child care, and preschool are critical to ensuring New Mexico's children get the best start possible. State and federal policymakers must continue to invest in these programs as a matter of public safety and national and economic security. Action now can improve the experiences of New Mexico's children today and strengthen our state in the years to come.

1 Harvard Center on the Developing Child Serve and return. <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/serve-and-return/> ; From neurons to neighborhoods (2000). <https://www.nap.edu/catalog/9824/from-neurons-to-neighborhoods-the-science-of-early-childhood-development>

2 Department of Defense. (2017). Qualified Military Available (QMA). Data acquired from the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness in November 2017.

3 National data show that 6 of 10 prisoners do not have a high school diploma; <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2011/demo/ewert-wildhagen-prisoner-education-4-6-11.pdf>

4 University of New Mexico (2019, January 23) Statewide home visiting capacity. <http://ccpi.unm.edu/visualizations/statewide-home-visiting-capacity>

5 DuMont, et al. (2010). A randomized trial of Healthy Families New York (HFNY). <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/232945.pdf>; Jones Harden, B., et al. (2012). Early Head Start home visitation. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/jcop.20525> ; Miller, T. (2015). Projected outcomes of Nurse-Family Partnership home visitation during 1996-2013. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26076883>

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7 Vandell, D. L., et al. (2010). Do effects of early child care extend to age 15 years? <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2938040/> ; Campbell, F.A., et al.. (2002). Early childhood education: Young adult outcomes from the Abecedarian Project. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1207/S1532480XADS0601_05 ; Yoshikawa, H., et al. (2013). Investing in our future. https://www.srcd.org/sites/default/files/documents/washington/mb_2013_10_16_investing_in_children.pdf

8 Malik, R., Hamm, K., Schochet, L., et al. (2018, December 6). America's child care deserts in 2018. <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/reports/2018/12/06/461643/americas-child-care-deserts-2018/>

9 National Center for Early Education Research (2019). State of preschool yearbook. http://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/New-Mexico_YB2018.pdf

10 Connors-Tadros, L. & Daily, S. (2018, April). Strategies to improve Instructional practice in early childhood settings. http://ceelo.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/2ceelo_fast_fact_LA-Instruction-LCT_041218_final.pdf ; Child Trends (2018, April). High-quality preschool can support healthy development and learning. <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/high-quality-preschool-can-support-healthy-development-and-learning>

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