

## **Preschool Key to Cutting Washington Prison Costs and Boosting School Success**

Washington can save \$386 million by improving the quality of its preschool programs and cutting crime

## 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

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**The over 5,000 law enforcement leaders around the nation who are members of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids—including the 230 here in Washington—have a direct message for everyone who cares about the impact and cost of crime: Pay now or pay much more later.**

Washington's jails are full of people serving time for serious and costly crimes. High school dropouts are more likely to end up in jail. But it doesn't have to be that way: Providing at-risk kids with high-quality early learning programs can reduce crime, its costs and impact in the future.

Law enforcement leaders know that one of the best ways to keep young people from dropping out of school and becoming criminals is to make sure they have a foundation for success in their earliest years. By standing up in support of high-quality early education for kids today we can see less crime and incarceration in years to come.

“ Investing in quality early education for at-risk children now will prevent criminal behavior later on.”



Mark Nichols  
Prosecuting Attorney,  
Clallam County



## Washington spends \$1.1 billion on corrections each year

We already know where our current path is leading us:



Although crime rates have fallen over the past 20 years, including in Washington, there are still 1.2 million violent crimes and 8 million property crimes committed against people in our communities across America every year.<sup>1</sup> Washington has more than **20,000 violent crimes annually**, a rate of 281 per 100,000 people.<sup>2</sup>

Washington has almost **18,000 adults incarcerated in state prisons.**<sup>3</sup>



Nationally, we spend nearly \$75 billion a year to incarcerate adults in federal and state prisons or local jails.<sup>4</sup> **Washington spends more than \$1.1 billion a year.**<sup>5,6</sup>

7-out-of-10 state prisoners nationwide do not have a high school diploma and finding stable employment once they leave prison is very challenging.<sup>7</sup> **A study found that Washington high schoolers who dropped out were 10 times more likely to be booked into jail** or admitted to corrections than their counterparts who graduated on time.<sup>8</sup>



Law enforcement leaders base these views on both personal experiences and research. A study that followed children who participated in a high-quality preschool and “parent-coaching” program through Chicago’s Child-Parent Centers found that **children not served by the program were 70 percent more likely to be arrested for a violent crime by age 18 than those who participated.** In recent years, studies of state preschool programs have found significant increases in participants’ later academic performance, and also important decreases in their need for special education and in being held back in school.

Reducing crime by improving the quality of preschool is one of the key reasons why Governors and state legislators across the political spectrum have made bold commitments to high-quality early education and care. And now we are at a key fork in the road: **Policymakers in our state have an opportunity to improve preschool for thousands of Washington children. Preschool has impressive results when it’s of high quality.**

We currently spend \$75 billion every year on corrections nationwide to incarcerate more than two million criminals. **Washington spends more than \$1.1 billion a year on corrections.**

A sophisticated analysis of nearly 20 preschool programs for disadvantaged children demonstrated that quality preschool returned an average “profit” (economic benefits minus costs) to society of more than \$29,000 for every child served. The analysis measured the economic benefits of both cutting crime and the cost of incarceration, as well as reducing other costs such as special education and grade retention. Applying that estimate to the over 13,300 low-income Washington children who are

currently served public preschool via the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) could save Washington approximately \$386 million over their lifetimes.

The choice for Washington is simple: Pay for high-quality early education programs now, or pay far more later for the costs of crime.

## The Cost of Crime in Washington

As law enforcement leaders, our number-one priority is protecting the safety of our communities in Washington. We do this by arresting, prosecuting and, when necessary, incarcerating people who commit crimes. But ultimately our best opportunity to improve public safety is to keep people from becoming involved in crime in the first place. To do so, we urge our elected leaders to invest in strategies and practices that have proven, positive and long-term impacts on crime reduction.

## Too Many Children Are Falling Behind Before They Start School

Fortunately, we can steer thousands of children across Washington toward more successful lives through high-quality early education, which research has shown can lead to **less child abuse and neglect, better performance in school, fewer high school drop-outs and, ultimately, fewer crimes committed and a reduction in the number of prisoners.**

The research behind these outcomes shows that the early childhood period (birth to age 5) is a time of rapid brain development, and that hundreds of new brain connections form every second.<sup>9</sup> Early experiences play a large role in determining how brain connections are formed and in the “wiring” that becomes the foundation on which all later learning is built.

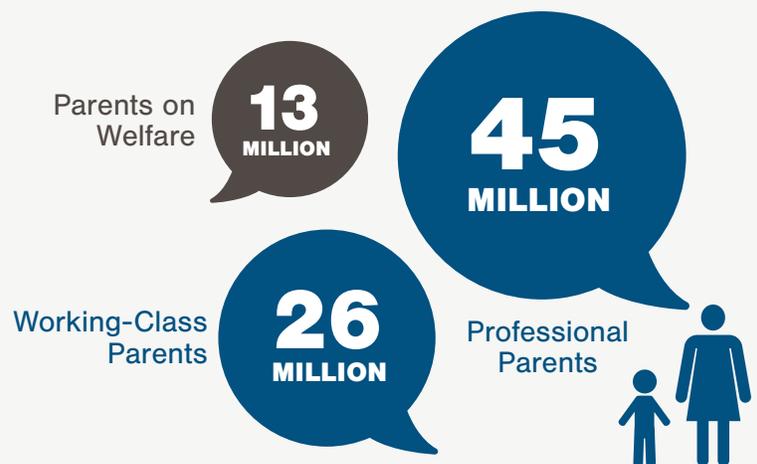
For example, by age six months, babies start to understand the link between words and their meanings. This sets the stage for language development and later reading, which are key to later school success. Yet children from different backgrounds have very different early experiences.

Researchers observed children in their own homes monthly for over two years, until the age of 3, and recorded how many words their parents spoke to them. There were large differences in the average number of words spoken to the children by professional parents, working class parents, and parents receiving welfare:

- **professional parents:** 45 million words
- **working-class parents:** 26 million
- **parents receiving welfare:** 13 million.<sup>10</sup>

These differences affected the children’s vocabulary development: by age 3, children with professional parents had average vocabularies of 1,116 words, compared with

## Words Spoken by Parents to their Young Children



Source: Hart & Risley, 2004

# A Fork in the Road

## The Path to Crime

The risk factors for crime can show up very early in life. Many parents and child care providers don't know the value of talking and reading to young children, and fostering creative play to develop cognitive, physical and behavioral skills. Too many young parents don't have good parenting mentors; some become overwhelmed and neglect or lash out at their children.

## The Path to Success

When children attend high-quality pre-K, they reap the benefits of a good teacher and interactions with peers, which can lead to better academic and social outcomes when they enter kindergarten. Voluntary home visiting programs start even earlier, working with at-risk parents during pregnancy and infancy to foster their child's development and prevent child abuse and neglect.



- More Dropouts
- Worse school outcomes
- More behavior problems
- More abuse and neglect



- Fewer Dropouts
- Better school outcomes
- Fewer behavior problems
- Less abuse and neglect



**More Crime =  
More Prisoners**



**More Graduates =  
More Productive Adults**

749 words for working-class and 525 for children of parents receiving welfare. By the time children reach kindergarten, too many are not only far behind in vocabulary development, but also on pre-literacy and pre-math skills, such as knowing the alphabet or being able to count to 10.

Many also face challenges in learning to control impulses and behavior so they can get along with other students and teachers. High-quality early education and care can help these children get on track, both academically and behaviorally, so they will be ready for kindergarten, despite these early deficits. High-quality early childhood programs also work with parents, to support them in their role as their children’s first teachers.

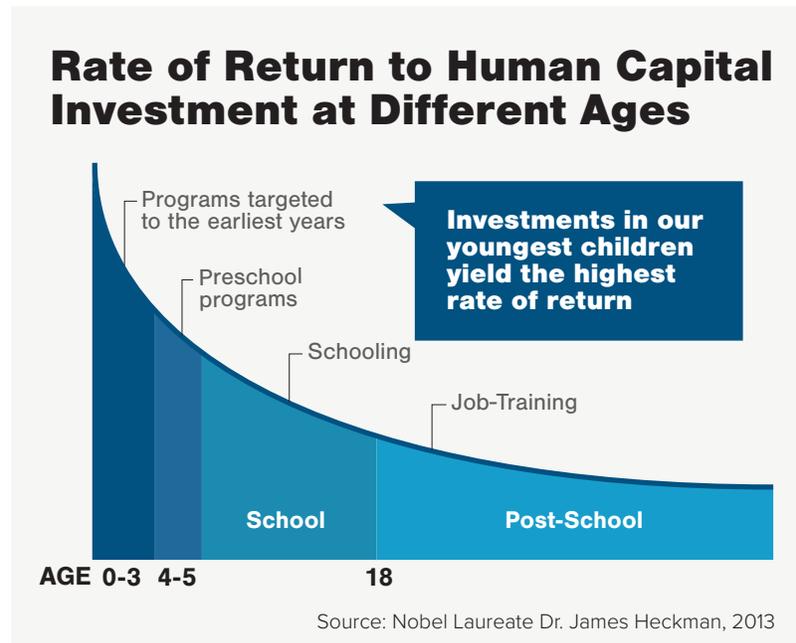
James Heckman, the Nobel Prize-winning economist from the University of Chicago, has conducted groundbreaking work with economists, statisticians and neuroscientists and has proven that the quality of early childhood development strongly influences health, social and economic outcomes. He argues that we should invest sufficiently in younger children and in providing “coaching” for their parents because those early investments will pay off.<sup>11</sup>

### High-Quality Early Care and Education: A Path to Less Crime

The path we set children upon in their earliest years can make a huge difference as they proceed through school and beyond. Research has shown that high-quality early education and care from birth through pre-school will result in more successful outcomes:

#### Less child abuse and neglect

The Chicago Child-Parent Centers (CPC) is a preschool program that has served over



100,000 children and followed them up to age 28. This program also coaches parents to help them understand their children’s health needs, create safer home environments and develop parenting skills. CPC cut child abuse and neglect in half for the children served, compared with similar children from families not being helped.<sup>12</sup>

#### Fewer behavior problems

Pennsylvania’s Preschool Counts Public Private Partnership program cut—from 22 percent to 4 percent—the portion of children at risk for problematic social and self-control behavior.<sup>13</sup>

#### Better school outcomes

A study of our state’s **ECEAP** found that more than 90 percent of students who participate in two years of ECEAP were ready for kindergarten in five of six developmental domains.<sup>14</sup> **ECEAP students also scored significantly higher in math and reading** in third to fifth grade compared to their peers who did not participate in ECEAP.<sup>15</sup>

**Ready for school:** Boston’s preschool program improved mathematics, literacy and

language skills among participating children equivalent to seven months of additional learning, compared with children who did not attend.<sup>16</sup> State preschool programs are also reporting important improvements.<sup>17</sup>

**Less special education:** Pennsylvania’s preschool program’s success in helping children learn self-control suggests fewer of those children will need special education. New Jersey, which has followed its children through the 4th and 5th grades, found that the children served were 31 percent less likely to be placed in special education than a control group.<sup>18</sup>

**Not held back in school:** Participants in Michigan’s state preschool, the Great Start Readiness Program, were held back in school 51 percent less often than non-participants.<sup>19</sup> New Jersey’s preschool program found its children were held back 40 percent less often.<sup>20</sup>

**Increases in reading and math scores that persist:** North Carolina’s Smart Start and More at Four initiatives to improve early education found that the children in counties that spent more per student were two months ahead in reading at fifth grade and 1.5 months ahead in math by fifth grade when compared with children in counties that spent less per student.<sup>21</sup> New Jersey’s preschool program, which served disadvantaged school districts statewide, reported that participating children were three-fourths of a year ahead in math and two-thirds of a year ahead in literacy in fourth and fifth grades.<sup>22</sup>

These findings show that academic gains from high-quality preschool continue to have a positive impact for students. The New Jersey researchers report that their findings are on par with the earlier results

achieved by Chicago’s CPC program, which later went on to achieve very strong graduation and crime reduction outcomes.

### Fewer dropouts

- The Chicago CPC program reported a **29 percent increase in high school graduation rates** by age 20 among its participants.<sup>23</sup>
- Michigan’s preschool program reported a **35 percent increase in graduates.**<sup>24</sup>
- The Perry Preschool Program saw a **44 percent increase in graduation rates** by age 40.<sup>25</sup>

*It’s significant to note that in Washington, 22 percent of high school students fail to graduate in four years.*<sup>26</sup>

### Less crime

- By age 18, children not served by the Chicago CPC program were **70 percent more likely to be arrested** for a violent crime.<sup>27</sup>

## Increasing graduation rates decreases serious crime

Economists Enrico Moretti and Lance Lochner studied the relationship over time between changes in graduation rates and crime. They concluded that a 10 percentage-point increase in graduation rates—going from 50 percent to 60 percent, for example—reduces murder and assault rates by about 20 percent.

Source: Lochner & Moretti (2004)

- By age 27, children not served by the Perry Preschool Program were **five times more likely to be chronic offenders**, with five or more arrests.<sup>28</sup>

### Fewer prisoners

- By age 24, the people served by the Chicago CPC were **20 percent less likely to have served time in a jail or prison.**<sup>29</sup>
- By age 40, the children served by the Perry Preschool program were **46 percent less likely to have been sentenced to prison or jail.**<sup>30</sup>

### It All Adds Up

No baby is destined, at birth, to become a criminal. The road to criminal behavior is paved with such challenges as childhood abuse and neglect, inadequate preparation for school, unaddressed behavior problems, poor academic performance and dropping out of high school. The path to success in life is driven by school readiness, the ability to get along with others, academic achievement and high school graduation. We need to take action, right now, to ensure children have the opportunity for quality early education and care so they can start on the right path for life.

### Quality and Accountability Are Key

Results from New Jersey, North Carolina and Michigan should effectively end the debate on whether high-quality state preschool efforts can be brought to scale and deliver strong and lasting results. Washington’s early learning programs must be supported to continue serving the state’s children, and if any state preschool or Head Start sites aren’t achieving meaningful and lasting results, such as improved math and literacy skills, the program administrators need to find out what the successful programs are doing differently.

To attain lasting results, programs must be high quality. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation describes 15 research-based “essential elements of high-quality preschool” that move beyond program inputs to examine what actually happens in the classroom, particularly the quality of teacher-child interactions and teacher instruction.<sup>33</sup> The heart of any program is the interaction between the teacher and the

## Stronger Parents

The most successful early childhood programs with long-term results—such as the Perry Preschool, CPC and New Jersey’s state pre-K program—work with parents to teach them how to reinforce positive behaviors and encourage them to routinely read and speak to their children, so they are better prepared for success in the years to come.

**Parents are their children’s first and most important teachers.** However, some parents do not have the knowledge or experience necessary to fully support their children’s development. High-quality early childhood programs partner with parents to help them improve their children’s academic and behavioral outcomes. Washington’s home-visiting program provides at-risk families with knowledge to raise a healthy and stable child.<sup>31</sup> ECEAP emphasizes parent engagement in three ways: by “partnering with parents to support their child’s education; working on job, education, and financial goals; [and] empowering parents to have a voice and develop advocacy skills.”<sup>32</sup>

# Washington must expand and improve the quality of its preschool programs

Just over 13,300 Washington children attended high-quality, public preschool through the Early Childhood Education and Assistance program in 2015—representing three percent and eight percent of three- and four-year olds in the state, respectively.<sup>40</sup> These numbers place Washington 19th in the nation for access to preschool for three-year-olds, and 32nd in access for four-year-olds.<sup>41</sup>

## Washington can improve ECEAP by:

**1** Increasing the per child reimbursement, as the current rate does not reflect the true cost of services.

**2** Serving more children by funding more slots for the 7,400 eligible children who are eligible for ECEAP but unable to enroll.

**3** Creating more learning spaces by granting providers assistance with acquiring, renovating and building new classroom space.

While the proportion of children enrolled in ECEAP has increased slightly since 2002, per student spending has fluctuated during this time period.<sup>42</sup> Delivering high-quality preschool requires an adequate investment in Washington's children.

child. To be able to deliver an evidence-based curriculum, teachers must be well-trained and receive quality, ongoing professional development training. Further, in order to attract and retain the best employees, early childhood teachers must be adequately compensated.

To deliver an evidence-based curriculum, teachers should have relevant preparation and accreditation in early childhood development, ongoing professional development opportunities, and adequate compensation. Right now, the average salary for a lead ECEAP teacher is \$31,000.<sup>34</sup> The Essential Elements study mentioned above recommends that teachers have a bachelor's degree, if accompanied by supports and adequate salaries. Currently, ECEAP requires an Associate's degree for lead teachers and Child Development Associate (CDA) certification for assistant teachers.

Further, preschool must have an evidence-based curriculum that supports all aspects of children's development: cognitive, physical, social and emotional. For example, Boston's preschool uses the evidence-based Building Blocks math curriculum. Preschoolers' math knowledge predicts later school success, predicting later reading achievement even better than do early reading skills.<sup>35</sup>

Time spent in preschool is an essential element of quality programs. Research shows that full-day and full-week preschool programs have been shown to be more effective at improving children's academic outcomes than part-time programs.<sup>36</sup> Washington's ECEAP programs typically meet for three hours a day, 3-4 days per week, falling short of the full-school-day, full-school-week quality benchmark.<sup>37</sup>

Finally, the essential quality elements also include a strong focus on data and



## States Know Early Learning Works

Across the nation, preschool has received support from both sides of the political aisle. In the 2016-2017 budget year, 30 states—17 with Republican leadership and 13 with Democratic leadership—increased funding for preschool.<sup>43</sup>

## Demonstrated Economic Benefits

A well-respected, independent cost-benefit analysis of nearly 20 different studies of preschool programs showed that preschool can return, on average, a “profit” (economic benefits minus costs) to society of more than \$29,000 for every child served.<sup>44</sup> Applying these benefits to the 13,300 children currently served by preschool in Washington, **our state will reap a return of more than \$386 million** over the lifetime of these children, if we ensure that the preschool is high quality. These economic benefits accrue due largely to reductions in the cost of future crime and increases in participants’ future wages, as well as decreases in other costs to society, such as children being held back in school or

“ Society will always need law enforcement, but we can reduce the demand by investing in high-quality early education to prepare our youth to be successful adults.”



Ken Hohenberg  
Chief of Police,  
Kennewick City

receiving special education. Other estimates of benefits are much higher. Clearly, preschool works and more than pays for itself. Other estimates of benefits are much higher. Clearly, preschool works and more than pays for itself.

## Conclusion

**Washington’s law enforcement officers urge policymakers to invest further in improving the quality our state’s preschool program.**

As law enforcement leaders, our job is to put those who commit serious crimes behind bars in Washington. But we all agree that a better and less expensive way to stop crime going forward is to prevent as many young children as possible from growing up to become involved in crime in the first place.

If Washington continues to invest wisely in quality preschool opportunities for its disadvantaged children, thousands of children can become successful, productive adults, instead of individuals of wasted potential who too often cost taxpayers dearly. When we support what works for our disadvantaged children, we put them—and our state—on a different, safer path.

For additional information, contact Erica Hallock, Washington State Director,  
Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, at [ehallock@fightcrime.org](mailto:ehallock@fightcrime.org) or (509) 991-2390.

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**36** Robin, K. B., Frede, E. C., & Barnett, W. S. (2006). Is more better? The effects of full-day vs. half-day preschool on early school achievement. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research. Retrieved from <http://nieer.org/resources/research/IsMoreBetter.pdf>

**37** Barnett, W. S., Carolan, M. E., Fitzgerald, J., & Squires, J. H. (2013). *The state of preschool 2013 state preschool yearbook*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Graduate School of Education, National Institute for Early Education Research.

**38** Steve Barnett made this comment in response to a recent study that showed that the academic benefits seen at the end of the preschool year in Tennessee later faded out. However, children who participated in the preschool program were half as likely to be held back in kindergarten. Barnett, W. S. (2013, August 2). An early look at early education in Tennessee. Retrieved from: <http://preschoolmatters.org/2013/08/02/an-early-look-at-early-education-in-tennessee/> Efforts are underway in Tennessee to improve the quality of the program, which has been found lacking. The entire sample of children is being followed through seventh grade and ongoing benefits will be examined.

**39** Barnett, W. S., Carolan, M. E., Fitzgerald, J., & Squires, J. H. (2013). *The state of preschool 2013 state preschool yearbook*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Graduate School of Education, National Institute for Early Education Research.

**40** National Institute for Early Education Research. (2016). *The State of Preschool 2015*. Retrieved from [http://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Washington\\_2015\\_rev1.pdf](http://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Washington_2015_rev1.pdf)

**41** National Institute for Early Education Research. (2015). *The State of Preschool Yearbook: 2015*. Table 1: State Rankings and Quality Checklist Sums. Retrieved from [http://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Yearbook\\_2015\\_rev1.pdf](http://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Yearbook_2015_rev1.pdf)

**42** Ibid.

**43** Education Commission of the States (2017, January). *State Preschool Funding for 2016-17 Fiscal Year: Trends and opportunities*. Retrieved from: <http://www.ecs.org/state-pre-k-funding-2016-17-fiscal-year-trends-and-opportunities/>

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