

THE WHITE HOUSE

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President Obama's Plan for Early Education for all Americans

"In states that make it a priority to educate our youngest children...studies show students grow up more likely to read and do math at grade level, graduate high school, hold a job, form more stable families of their own. We know this works. So let's do what works and make sure none of our children start the race of life already behind."

President Barack Obama

State of the Union, February 12, 2013

The beginning years of a child's life are critical for building the early foundation needed for success later in school and in life. Leading economists agree that high-quality early learning programs can help level the playing field for children from lower-income families on vocabulary, social and emotional development, while helping students to stay on track and stay engaged in the early elementary grades. Children who attend these programs are more likely to do well in school, find good jobs, and succeed in their careers than those who don't. And research has shown that taxpayers receive a high average return on investments in high-quality early childhood education, with savings in areas like improved educational outcomes, increased labor productivity, and a reduction in crime.

In his State of the Union address, President Obama called on Congress to expand access to high-quality preschool to every child in America. As part of that effort, the President will propose a series of new investments that will establish a continuum of high-quality early learning for a child - beginning at birth and continuing to age 5. By doing so, the President would invest critical resources where we know the return on our dollar is the highest: in our youngest children.

- **Providing High-Quality Preschool for Every Child:** The President is proposing a new federal-state partnership to provide all low- and moderate-income four-year old children with high-quality preschool, while also expanding these programs to reach additional children from middle class families and incentivizing full-day kindergarten policies. This investment – financed through a cost-sharing model with states – will help close America’s school readiness gap and ensure that children have the chance to enter kindergarten ready for success.
- **Growing the Supply of Effective Early Learning Opportunities for Young Children:** To expand high-quality early learning opportunities in the years before preschool, the President will call for a significant investment in a new Early Head Start-Child Care partnership. Competitive grants will support communities that expand the availability of Early Head Start and child care providers that can meet the highest standards of quality for infants and toddlers, serving children from birth through age 3.
- **Extending and Expanding Evidence-Based, Voluntary Home Visiting:** Voluntary home visiting programs enable nurses, social workers, and other professionals to connect families to services and educational support that will improve a child’s health, development, and ability to learn. President Obama has already committed \$1.5 billion to expand home visitation to hundreds of thousands of America’s most vulnerable children and families across all 50 states. The President will pursue substantial investments to expand these important programs to reach additional families in need.

The President’s Commitment to Early Education

A zip code should never predetermine the quality of any child’s educational opportunities. Yet studies show that children from low-income families are less likely to have access to high-quality early education, and less likely to enter school prepared for success. By third grade, children from low-income families who are not reading at grade level are six times less likely to graduate from high school than students who are proficient. Often, the high costs of private preschool and lack of public programs also narrow options for middle-class families.

High-quality early childhood education provides the foundation for all children’s success in school and helps to reduce achievement gaps. Despite the individual and economic benefits of early education, our nation has lagged in its commitment to ensuring the provision of high quality public preschool in our children’s earliest years.

The Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) estimates that the United States ranks 28th out of 38 countries for the share of four-year olds enrolled in early childhood education. And fewer than 3 in 10 four-year olds are enrolled in high-quality programs.

Preschool for All

- **The President's proposal will improve quality and expand access to preschool**, through a cost sharing partnership with all 50 states, to extend federal funds to expand high-quality public preschool to reach all low- and moderate-income four-year olds from families at or below 200% of poverty. The U.S. Department of Education will allocate dollars to states based their share of four-year olds from low- and moderate-income families and funds would be distributed to local school districts and other partner providers to implement the program. The proposal would include an incentive for states to broaden participation in their public preschool program for additional middle-class families, which states may choose to reach and serve in a variety of ways, such as a sliding-scale arrangement.
- **Funds will support states as they ensure that children are enrolled in high-quality programs.** In order to access federal funding, states would be required to meet quality benchmarks that are linked to better outcomes for children, which include:
 - State-level standards for early learning;
 - Qualified teachers for all preschool classrooms; and
 - A plan to implement comprehensive data and assessment systems.

Preschool programs across the states would meet common and consistent standards for quality across all programs, including:

- Well-trained teachers, who are paid comparably to K-12 staff;
 - Small class sizes and low adult to child ratios;
 - A rigorous curriculum;
 - Comprehensive health and related services; and
 - Effective evaluation and review of programs.
- **The proposal also encourages states to expand the availability of full-day kindergarten.** Only 6 out of 10 of America's kindergarten students have access

to a full day of learning. In order to ensure that our kindergartners spend the time they need in school to reach rigorous benchmarks and standards, funds under this program may also be used to expand full-day kindergarten once states have provided preschool education to low- and moderate-income four year-olds.

- **Under the President's proposal, investment in the federal Head Start program will continue to grow.** The President's plan will maintain and build on current Head Start investments, to support a greater share of infants, toddlers, and three-year olds in America's Head Start centers, while state preschool settings will serve a greater share of four-year olds.

Quality Early Learning for Our Youngest Children

- **The President will also launch a new Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership program,** to support states and communities that expand the availability of Early Head Start and child care providers that can meet the highest standards of quality for infants and toddlers, serving children from birth through age 3. Funds will be awarded through Early Head Start on a competitive basis to enhance and support early learning settings; provide new, full-day, comprehensive services that meet the needs of working families; and prepare children for the transition into preschool. This strategy – combined with an expansion of publicly funded preschool education for four-year olds – will ensure a cohesive and well-aligned system of early learning for children from birth to age five.
- **The President is proposing to expand the Administration's evidence-based home visiting initiative,** through which states are implementing voluntary programs that provide nurses, social workers, and other professionals to meet with at-risk families in their homes and connect them to assistance that impacts a child's health, development, and ability to learn. These programs have been critical in improving maternal and child health outcomes in the early years, leaving long-lasting, positive impacts on parenting skills; children's cognitive, language, and social-emotional development; and school readiness. This will help ensure that our most vulnerable Americans are on track from birth, and that later educational investments rest upon a strong foundation.

Building on Success

President Obama has committed to a comprehensive early learning agenda for America's children that begins at birth and provides the support and services needed to set them on a path of success in school and in life:

- **Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge:** The Early Learning Challenge has rewarded 14 states that have agreed to raise the bar on the quality of their early childhood education programs, establish higher standards across programs and provide critical links with health, nutrition, mental health, and family support for our neediest children.
- **Head Start and Early Head Start:** President Obama has made historic investments in the Head Start and Early Head Start programs to reach an additional 61,000 children. Under the President's leadership, enrollment in Early Head Start in particular has nearly doubled. The Obama Administration has also implemented needed reform in the Head Start program by identifying lower-performing grantees and ensuring that those failing to meet new, rigorous benchmarks face new competition for continued federal funding.
- **Supporting our Federal Child Care System:** The President has proposed new investments to expand access and quality in the Child Care and Development Block Grant.