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Early Childhood Education in Buffalo, New York

Abstract

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) defines early childhood education as the learning experience of a child from birth to age eight. It is generally agreed that the human brain undergoes great growth and change in the years before age five. High-quality early childhood education will include development of a child's cognition, language, motor, adaptive, social, and emotional skills.

Keywords

Buffalo, Education, Early Childhood Education, Fact Sheet, PPG, PDF

Early Childhood Education in Buffalo, New York

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What is early childhood education?

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) defines early childhood education as the learning experience of a child from birth to age eight.

It is generally agreed that the human brain undergoes great growth and change in the years before age five. High-quality early childhood education will include development of a child's cognition, language, motor, adaptive, social, and emotional skills.ⁱ

What is the difference between daycare, nursery school, and preschool?

- Daycare centers provide care and supervision for children, usually on a full-day basis. Daycare centers have flexible schedules to accommodate working parents.
- Nursery schools present children with the opportunity for socialization and play.
- Preschool is a general term describing programs that aim to provide children with educational instruction, in addition to socialization and play. Preschools maintain set schedules and generally require more parental involvement than daycare centers.



- Prekindergarten (pre-k) denotes an early childhood education program that is “readily associated with the K-12 system and is clearly defined as a significant year or two of learning that provides three and four-year-old children with the skills necessary to succeed in kindergarten and beyond.” The terms “pre-k” and “preschool” are frequently used interchangeably; for

example, while New York and Texas use the term “pre-k”, California and New Jersey label similar schooling “preschool.”ⁱⁱ

Why is education in the early stages of childhood especially important?

- **Adjustment to the school environment.** One of the goals of early childhood education is to help children adjust to the social and educational environment of school. Studies have linked the successful transition to school at a young age to long-term outcomes such as reduced school dropout rates and increased employment.
- **Lifelong patterns for success.** Evidence indicates that the human brain develops fastest before age five and that long-term achievement patterns are established at a very young age. Children growing up in low-income environments are less likely to receive education at home than their economically advantaged peers and thus often start school at a disadvantage. Studies have shown that children from low-income homes who participated in early childhood education programs had higher high school graduation rates than low-income children who did not attend such programs.
- **Cumulative nature of the learning process.** Many of the skills learned in early childhood education programs, such as math and reading, are cumulative in nature. If a child lags behind his or her peers in learning these skills early on, it may be difficult for him or her to ever overcome this gap in comprehension.
- **Gaps in achievement are difficult to correct.** Fixing educational and social deficiencies is difficult when students lack the foundational skills. Programs to improve achievement at the high school level, as well as programs for dislocated workers and welfare recipients, have met limited success.
- **Gaps in achievement are expensive to correct.** For example, children who have participated in early childhood education programs are less likely to repeat a grade or enroll in special education programs. In addition, investment in early childhood education provides a benefit across many years, as compared to programs that come later in life.ⁱⁱⁱ



How is early childhood education linked to economic development?

Some economists, notably Arthur Rolnick and Rob Grunewald of the Minnesota Federal Reserve, believe that investment in early childhood education can greatly benefit the larger economy. These economists assert that the economic gains from public investment in early childhood education are much greater than the economic gains arising from other forms of public investment, such as subsidies and tax breaks used to encourage companies to locate in a particular community. These economists find that as compared to the traditional strategy of economic development pursued by states and municipalities, governmental support for early childhood education is a low-risk, long-term investment.^{iv}



The economic gains resulting from increased funding for early education programs are twofold. First, a student who

participates in early childhood education may personally benefit by earning higher wages later on in life. In addition, the unemployment rate is lower for people who have a professional degree than for those who have a high school degree or have not finished high school.^v

Second, investment in early child education can provide advantages to the economy as a whole. Significantly, early childhood education cultivates in future workers greater skills than they would have had otherwise. People who achieve a greater level of education pay more taxes. In addition, people who did not receive support in their development before age five are more likely than others to depend on public assistance. In this way, investment in early childhood education can reduce the amount of money spent on public services, such as welfare and Medicaid.^{vi}

Children who participate in early childhood education programs are less likely to commit a crime, in part because they are more likely to graduate from high school. Seventy percent of New York State's prison inmates do not have a high school degree. A recent study showed that a ten percent increase in high school graduation rates could prevent approximately 180 murders and 9,100 aggravated assaults in the state each year. It is estimated that New York State could save \$573 million a year in costs associated with crime if male high school graduation rates were raised by ten percent.^{vii}

A long-term analysis of an early childhood education program in Chicago yielded other unexpected economic outcomes. For example, children who participated in the program at Chicago Child Parent Centers were more likely than other children to carry private health insurance and less likely to have mental-health difficulties.^{viii}

In total, a recent study indicates that for every \$1 spent on early childhood education education, \$7 is saved in other costs related to child welfare, special education, and crime.^{ix} Economic analysis of several early childhood development programs has showed a return rate of \$3 to \$17 for every dollar spent. This represents an annual rate of return between 7 and 18 percent, adjusted for inflation.^x



Lack of adequate childcare serves as a barrier to employment for many parents. Parents whose children participate in early childhood education programs are better able to work than others. Thus, these parents contribute to the local economy by earning, spending, and paying taxes. Likewise, businesses benefit from employees who are absent infrequently and who have a low turnover rate.^{xi}

Is investment in high-quality early childhood programs by itself sufficient to promote economic development?

No. While investment in early childhood education can provide great advantages to both the child and the economy, early childhood education does not by itself prevent subsequent academic and economic problems. Early childhood education programs are most effective where several additional factors are present:

- The early childhood education programs are preceded by learning experiences in the period before the child attends school (ages 0-3).
- The early childhood education programs are followed by high quality educational experiences in elementary, secondary, and postsecondary education.^{xii}

How has the research on early childhood education and economic development been criticized?

Three longitudinal studies of low-income children provided with intensive early childhood education interventions provide much of the support for the claim that high-quality early childhood education can have significant economic benefits.

- In the mid-seventies, the Abecedarian Project in North Carolina provided full-time, high quality early childhood education to 111 economically disadvantaged children from birth through age five. Progress was measured at ages twelve, fifteen, and twenty-one. Researchers found that the children who participated in the early childhood education program had higher test scores and completed more years of education than non-participating students.^{xiii}
- Michigan's Perry Preschool Program compared the performance of 123 4-year-olds provided with early childhood education with a control group of children who received no preschool. The study tracked the children to age forty and found that those who had attended the Perry Preschool Program had higher earnings, were more likely to hold a job, had attained higher levels of education, and had committed fewer crimes.^{xiv}
- The Chicago Longitudinal Study is currently following 1,500 low-income children who participated in government-sponsored preschool programs in the Chicago Public Schools. The most recent follow-up was conducted when the children were 24-years-old; it was established that the children in the intensive preschool program attained higher levels of education, were more likely to be employed, and were less likely to commit a crime.^{xv}



Critics maintain that the research linking early childhood education with economic development is based on a handful of studies involving a small number of students, in extremely expensive and high quality programs, and that general conclusions on economic development cannot be extrapolated from such a small sample.

Moreover, these skeptics assert, it would be impossible to duplicate small and successful early childhood education programs, such as the Perry Preschool and Abecedarian

programs, on a large scale basis. Critics assert that the cost of large scale preschool programs would outweigh economic gains.^{xvi}

What is the status of early childhood education in New York State?

Eighty-four percent of New York State's 3-year-olds and forty-five percent of its 4-year-olds are not enrolled in prekindergarten, Head Start, or other early childhood education programs. Head Start serves only forty-two percent of New York's eligible children.^{xvii}

Which children face the greatest risk of receiving inadequate or no early childhood education at all?

The socio-economic status of a child's family greatly influences access to early childhood education. For example, nationwide, seventy percent of children from families with incomes greater than \$100,000 year attend preschool while only forty-three percent of children from families with incomes between \$15,000 and \$50,000 attend preschool.^{xviii}

Generally, middle-class children are no more likely than low-income children to attend preschool. Middle-class children are often ineligible for public programs, and their families are frequently unable to afford the cost of quality private programs.

Full-time childcare in the Buffalo-Niagara region is estimated to be at least \$6,200 per child per year. In comparison, the annual tuition for in-state, undergraduate students at the University at Buffalo is \$4,350.^{xix}

Will any kind of early childhood education create economic benefits?

The early childhood education must be high quality. Studies indicate that the most successful programs are "center based" (taking place in preschools, nursery schools, elementary schools, and other learning centers) as opposed to programs operating out of the home.^{xx} Hallmarks of high-quality early childhood education include:



- Small class-size;
- Low teacher-student ratio;
- Parental involvement;
- College-educated teachers;
- A curriculum encouraging the development of the child's language, motor, emotional, physical, and social skills and ability to adapt.^{xxi}

Is there an accreditation system for early child education providers?

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has accreditation standards for early childhood education programs. More than 10,000 early childhood education programs nationwide are accredited. Factors relevant to accreditation include: interactions between staff and children, curriculum (in the areas of social, emotional, physical, language, and cognitive skills), teaching approaches, assessment results, health, safety, administration, and interaction between staff and parents. The accreditation process includes a site visit by a representative from the NAEYC.^{xxii}

What is Head Start?

Head Start is a program administered by the United States Department of Health and Human Services that aims to “promote school readiness by enhancing the social and cognitive development of children through the provision of educational, health, nutritional, social and other services to enrolled children and their families.” Head Start provides grants to local organizations and public school systems to provide child development support to low-income children and their families.

Children from birth to age five from families subsisting on incomes below the poverty line are eligible for participation in Head Start (ages three to five) and Early Head Start (birth to age three). Regardless of family income, children from families receiving public assistance and foster children are eligible for Head Start.

Head Start strives towards a holistic model of early childhood development, linking children, families, staff, and the community.^{xxiii}



Does New York State have a program encouraging early childhood education?

Yes. Currently, though not required by law, every school district in New York State offers kindergarten. In 1997, the New York State Legislature established the Universal PreKindergarten Program (UPK). This program aims to provide access to pre-k for all four-year-old children in the state. Participation in the UPK program is voluntary for school districts and families alike.

The program is administered by the New York State Education Department (NYSED). School districts must apply for participation in the UPK program. School districts accepted into the UPK program receive grant funding. For the 2007-2008 school year, New York State allocated \$438 million for the UPK program; the amount of funding has been increased to \$452 million for the 2008-2009 school year.^{xxiv} Districts can supplement UPK grants with local tax revenue and other funding sources.

A collaboration requirement is tied to the receipt of funding. School districts must use at least 10% of their UPK grant to contract with one or more eligible agencies for the provision of early childhood education services. Eligible agencies for collaboration include: Head Start, childcare and daycare centers, private and parochial schools, nursery schools, special education providers, BOCES, libraries, museums, and other early childhood care providers.

Generally, the legislation delegates to participating school districts the decision as to which criteria can be used in selecting children for enrollment in pre-k programs. However, school districts are not able to give preference for enrollment to children from economically disadvantaged families. Where there are more applicants than can be enrolled, school districts are required to select eligible children on a random basis.^{xxv}

How has New York State's UPK program been criticized?

- **Lack of funding.** Many of the school districts that have chosen not to participate in UPK claim that the state funding is not sufficient. These school districts assert that the establishment of a pre-k program in their municipality would require taxes to be raised and other programs cut.
- **Lack of school district participation.** Critics assert that the voluntary nature of the UPK program undermines the larger goal. More than one third of the 677 school districts in New York State do not participate in UPK. Most of the non-participatory districts are located in suburban or rural areas. Last year, \$67.5 million in state UPK funding was not claimed. Non-participatory school districts counter that UPK funding is inadequate and that parents in their districts prefer to educate their children at home or through private programs.
- **Lack of student participation.** In 2007, only 38% of New York's eligible four-year olds participated in UPK. The low level of student participation in UPK has been attributed to lack of information, misconceptions that UPK is only for students that need remedial help, and non-participation by school districts.^{xxvi}

What large-scale early childhood education programs have been instituted by other states?

- **Oklahoma.** More than 70% of four-year-olds in Oklahoma attend public preschool; this is the highest percentage of all the states. Oklahoma's program is voluntary. The state provides \$4,000 per child per year; the rest of the funding comes from federal or private sources. Every preschool teacher must have a bachelor's degree and there must be one teacher for every ten students. A recent study showed that four-year-olds in Oklahoma who attended preschool did 52% better on a letter recognition test than children who did not.^{xxvii}
- **Georgia.** Georgia was the first state to offer universal, voluntary pre-k. Currently, 65% of Georgia's four-year-olds are in publicly funded pre-k programs. Georgia's pre-k program has 79,000 students enrolled for the 2008-2009 school year. Georgia provides approximately \$4,010 in funding.^{xxviii}

What publicly funded early childhood education programs are available in Buffalo?

- **Buffalo Public Schools (BPS).** BPS offers all-day pre-kindergarten and kindergarten for children residing in the city of Buffalo. Pre-kindergarten students must turn four-years-old by December 1 of the year they begin; Kindergarten students must turn five-years-old by December 1. BPS pre-k and kindergarten teachers have bachelor's degrees and they are required to pass the NYS Early Childhood Education certification test. Recent initiatives in the BPS have resulted in smaller class



sizes and more instructional time for children. Approximately 85% of four-year-olds living in the City of Buffalo participate in the pre-k program. This program receives funding from the Universal PreKindergarten Program.^{xxxix}

- **Charter Schools.** Charter schools are tuition-free schools operating under a five-year contract with the NYS Board of Regents. None of the charter schools in Western New York offer pre-k; however, several area charter schools have kindergarten programs. The King Center Charter School (see above right) runs an “early admissions” program for children under age five. This program aims to prepare preschool-age children for kindergarten with in-home instruction.^{xxx}
- **Bethel Head Start.** An arm of the Bethel AME Church on Michigan Avenue in Buffalo, Bethel Head Start runs twelve Head Start Programs in Western New York. Eight of the programs are located in the city of Buffalo. Bethel Head Start aims to prepare children for kindergarten by promoting “necessary language, cognitive, and early reading skills.” Many of the preschool programs offered are full day; some are half-day only. The Bethel Head Start program works in partnership with the BPS Board of Education. Bethel Head Start receives funding from the federal Head Start Program and from UPK.^{xxxi}



- **Community Action Organization of Erie County (CAO).** CAO offers eighteen Head Start programs and four Early Head Start Programs as part of its “comprehensive child development services to Erie County’s income eligible children (ages 0 to five years) and families in the fields of education, health, mental health, social services, disabilities services, transportation services, and parent involvement.”^{xxxii}
- **Baker Victory Services (BVS).** The BVS Early Childhood Program provides early childhood education and development for children from birth to age five. Services include: “speech/language therapy, occupational/physical therapy, family education, and/or special education.” The programs are provided at home, in daycare, or in preschool.^{xxxiii}
- **Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo, Good Schools for All, “Read to Succeed Initiative.”** The Read to Succeed initiative is a coalition of over forty local organizations working to improve literacy in the city of Buffalo. This program provides literacy resources for children as young as six months old. This initiative received a \$4.1 million dollar grant from the federal government last year.^{xxxiv}

Where can I find out more about early childhood education in Buffalo?

- Child Care Resource Network: <http://www.wnychildren.com/>
- Buffalo Public Schools, Early Childhood Department: <http://www.buffaloschools.org/EarlyChildhood.cfm>
- Buffalo and Erie County Public Library, *Parent’s Place*: <http://www.buffalolib.org/parents/childcare.asp>

ⁱ National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), About NAEYC, available at <http://www.naeyc.org/about/>; Rolnick, Arthur J. and Rob Grunewald, Early Childhood Development: Economic Development with a High Public Return. *Fedegazette* available at http://www.minneapolisfed.org/publications_papers/pub_display.cfm?id=3832.

ⁱⁱ Bluesky Montessori Preschool (Seattle, WA)

<http://www.blueskiesmontessori.org/faqs.html#diff>; Agassiz Preschool (Cambridge, MA) <http://www.agassizpreschool.org/about/faq.cfm>; Pre[K] Now, “Pre-k” vs. “Preschool” <http://www.preknow.org/resource/abc/prekvspreschool.cfm>.

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^v United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics Division of Information Services, *Education Pays* (chart) available at <http://www.bls.gov/emp/emptab7.htm> and *Earnings by Educational Attainment and Sex, 1979 and 2002* available at <http://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2003/oct/wk3/art04.htm>.

^{vi} Thompson, William C. and Gail B. Nayowith. (2007 Aug. 26). Teach the Toddlers. *New York Times*, A1.

^{vii} Lou Jean Fleron, Lauren Breen, Danielle Dimitrov, and Regina L. Grogan. *Buffalo Child care Means Business*. Cornell University ILR (2006) at 14; Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, New York. *School or the Streets: Crime and New York's Dropout Crisis* available at <http://www.fightcrime.org/reports/fcik-dropout-ny.pdf>; Matthews, Cara. (2008 Sept. 4). Group: More Pre-K Could Mean Less Crime. *Ithaca Journal*.

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^x Rolnick, Arthur J. and Rob Grunewald. (2007 Jan. 4). Early Intervention on a Large Scale. *Education Week*, 26 (17). Retrieved October 27, 2008, from Academic Search Premier Database.

^{xi} Legal Momentum's Family Initiative and Massachusetts Institute of Technology Workplace Center. (2005 Apr.). *Early Education for All: A Wise Investment: Recommendations Arising from 'The Economic Impacts of Child Care and Early Education: Financing Solutions for the Future' a Conference Sponsored by Legal Momentum's Family Initiative and the MIT Workplace Center*, 7 available at web.mit.edu/workplacecenter/docs/Full%20Report.pdf.

^{xii} Committee for Economic Development (CED), A Statement by the Research and Policy Committee of the Committee for Economic Development, *The Economic Promise of Investing in High-Quality Preschool: Using Early Education to Improve Economic Growth and the Fiscal Sustainability of States and the Nation*, 24. Accessed via the website of the CED: <http://www.ced.org/projects/educ.shtml>.

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- ^{xiv} High/Scope Perry Preschool Study <http://www.highscope.org/Content.asp?ContentId=219>.
- ^{xv} Chicago Longitudinal Study, <http://www.waisman.wisc.edu/cls/>.
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- ^{xxii} See NAEYC website: <http://www.naeyc.org/about/positions/PSACC98.asp>.
- ^{xxiii} U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start, website: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ohs/programs/index.html#ecd>.
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- ^{xxv} New York State Department of Education, Elementary, Middle, Secondary and Continuing Education, Statewide Prekindergarten Programs, *NYS Universal Prekindergarten Program: Questions and Answers*, available at www.aera.net/uploadedFiles/Journals_and_Publications/Research_Points/RPFall05.pdf. <http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/nyc/QuestionAnswerMidYear07.htm>; Hu, Winnie. (2008 Aug. 23) State's Goal, Pre-K for All, Is Still Far Off. *New York Times*, A1; Thompson, William C. and Gail B. Nayowith. (2007 Aug. 26). Teach the Toddlers. *New York Times*, A1. Jones, David R. (2006 June 15). Don't Starve Universal Pre-K. *New York Amsterdam News*, 5.

^{xxvi} Hu, Winnie. (2008 Aug. 23) State's Goal, Pre-K for All, Is Still Far Off. *New York Times*, A1.

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^{xxxi} For more information and program locations see the website of Bethel Head Start: <http://www.bethelheadstart.org/>.

^{xxxii} For more information and program locations see the website of CAO: <http://www.caoec.org/html/map.html>.

^{xxxiii} For more information see the BVS website:

<http://www.bakervictoryservices.org/services.html>.

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