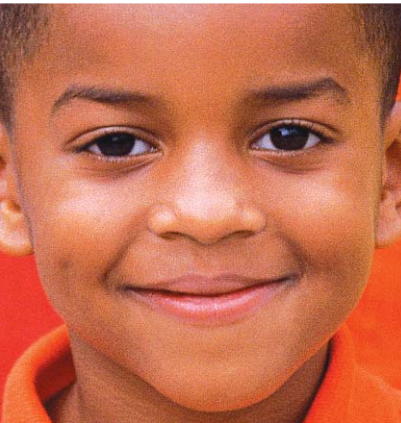




Preschool for All

High-Quality Early Education
For All of Illinois' Children

Spring 2006



Illinois Early Learning Council

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Summary of Recommendations

1. ACCESS FOR ALL

- ✓ Serve all three- and four-year-olds on a voluntary basis
- ✓ Serve children under age three who are at risk of school failure
- ✓ Make preschool programs accessible to all families
- ✓ Include children with special needs
- ✓ Serve non-English-speaking children and families

2. QUALITY FOR ALL

- ✓ Require high staff qualifications
- ✓ Create a pipeline of qualified staff
- ✓ Support ongoing learning by teachers and other staff
- ✓ Utilize proven, research-based curricula
- ✓ Utilize proven, research-based program models for infants and toddlers and their families
- ✓ Focus on young children's individual needs
- ✓ Evaluate programs and monitor adherence to standards

3. ATTENTION TO ALL ASPECTS OF SCHOOL READINESS

- ✓ Provide parent education, engagement, and family support
- ✓ Address physical development and health
- ✓ Meet the unique developmental needs of individual children
- ✓ Promote social and emotional development
- ✓ Ease transitions between settings

4. BUILDING ON ALL WE'VE ACCOMPLISHED

- ✓ Allow families to choose from a wide range of settings
- ✓ Expand good programs
- ✓ Help good programs get even better
- ✓ Build on the existing infrastructure
- ✓ Improve linkage and integration with child care
- ✓ Encourage local community collaborations to link and coordinate services for young children and their families

Spring 2006

Dear Governor Blagojevich and Members of the Illinois General Assembly:

As Co-Chairs of the Illinois Early Learning Council, we are pleased to share the Council's recommendations for Preschool for All, a bold plan to make Illinois the first state to offer high-quality preschool to all three- and four-year-olds whose families choose to enroll them. Preschool for All would build on Illinois' solid foundation of early learning programs to expand education services provided through the Early Childhood Block Grant, adding thousands of young children to the program and guaranteeing continued quality in the expansion.

Over 200 stakeholders—including representatives from the General Assembly, schools, child care centers and homes, Head Start, higher education, state, local, and federal government agencies, business, law enforcement, foundations, and parents—participated in the Council's year long process of developing recommendations to guide the Governor's plan for preschool expansion.

The movement toward Preschool for All reflects important new insights into the way children learn and the kinds of early experiences that improve the odds of school success. More is known today than ever before about how early experiences affect children's brain development and shape lifelong learning. We know that children who participate in high-quality preschool make better progress in language, math, and social skills, enabling them to take full advantage of all that school has to offer. We also know that thousands of Illinois families cannot access high-quality preschool programs, particularly those earning moderate incomes who do not qualify for state-funded preschool but cannot afford private program tuition on their own. Preschool for All will extend sorely needed resources to these children. Given what we know about the role of the early years in school success, access for all children is a matter of equal opportunity for the best possible start in life.

Thank you for your past support in providing high-quality early learning opportunities to our youngest citizens and building partnerships with families to enhance their children's development. Preschool for All is the next logical step in the progression of bipartisan support this very important issue has received to date. We look forward to continuing to work with you to ensure that Illinois takes full advantage of the learning potential of all its children.

Sincerely,



Harriet Meyer
President
Ounce of Prevention Fund
Co-Chair



Elliot Regenstein
Director of Education Reform
Governor's Office
Co-Chair

Illinois Early Learning Council Overview

Background

The State of Illinois supports many early learning programs for children from birth to age five and their families. Governor Rod Blagojevich and members of the General Assembly took a major step toward establishing a statewide high-quality early childhood system by approving legislation in the Spring of 2003 that created the Illinois Early Learning Council. The Council is comprised of 46 gubernatorial and legislative appointees who serve on a voluntary, unpaid basis. Council members represent a broad range of constituencies, including schools, child care centers and homes, Head Start, higher education, state, local, and federal government agencies, the General Assembly, business, law enforcement, foundations, and parents.

Vision

The Illinois Early Learning Council is committed to ensuring that all Illinois children are safe, healthy, eager to learn, and ready to succeed by the time they enter school. The Council's goal is to meet the early learning needs of all children from birth to age five and their families by establishing a high-quality, accessible, and comprehensive statewide early learning system. The Council guides collaborative efforts to coordinate, improve, and expand existing early childhood programs and services, including making use of existing reports, research, and planning efforts.

Broad Purposes

- To review recommendations of previous and ongoing early childhood efforts and initiatives and oversee implementation
- To develop multi-year plans to expand programs and services to address gaps and insufficient capacity and to ensure quality
- To reduce or eliminate policy, regulatory, and funding barriers
- To engage in collaborative planning, coordination, and linkages across programs, divisions, and agencies at the state level

Illinois Early Learning Council Website:
<http://www.illinois.gov/gov/elc>

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	i
PART 1 Why Preschool for All?.....	1
• Why Now?.....	2
• Why Here?	2
• Why Preschool?	4
• Why For All?	6
• Ten Reasons to Support Preschool for All.....	8
PART 2 The Cornerstones of Preschool for All.....	11
1. Access For All	11
2. Quality For All	12
3. Attention to All Aspects of School Readiness	15
4. Building on All We've Accomplished	16
PART 3 Putting the Pieces Together	21
• Building New Capacity	21
• Funding	22
• Forging a Coordinated Early Learning System	22
• Community Collaboration.....	24
• Taking Action is the Only Option	24
• Appendix A: Recommendations for Future Consideration.....	26
• Appendix B: Illinois' Early Childhood Programs	27
• Citations.....	29
PART 4 Illinois Early Learning Council Members and Committee Members	31





Executive Summary

Preschool for All is an idea whose time has come. Across the nation, Americans are now rethinking early education. These shifts are informed by a solid body of research on the benefits of early education, as well as a growing recognition of the evolving needs of America's young children and their families. These new realities include:

- A shift from a focus on child care as a support for working parents toward a more complete recognition that quality early learning is a powerful strategy to strengthen education and close the achievement gap.
- A transformation from a system of education that begins with kindergarten to one that starts much earlier, based on scientific understanding of how children develop and learn.
- A change from a model based on entitlement for some families to one built on the notion that early learning opportunities should be available to all.

These shifts also reflect a growing consensus that the billions of dollars invested each year in K-12 education can pay off more fully when all families have the option of enrolling their children in affordable, high-quality preschool programs that set the stage for educational and social success.

What Does the Research Tell Us?

The movement toward Preschool for All reflects important new insights into the way children learn and the kinds of early experiences that improve the odds of school success. In recent years, scores of experts—from educators and economists to behavioral researchers and brain scientists—have shown the wisdom of public investment in high-quality early childhood education programs. We know that early experiences affect children's brain development, and brain development, in turn, shapes lifelong learning. Children who participate in high-quality preschool programs make better progress in language, math, and social skills than their peers who have missed this opportunity. And, children in families earning moderate incomes have the hardest time accessing high-quality services because they do not qualify for government programs but cannot afford full tuition.

Several landmark studies have found that good preschool programs also save money. Researchers who followed participants of Michigan's High/Scope Perry Preschool program over decades found that every \$1 invested in high-quality preschool saved the public more than \$7 in reduced costs of crime, welfare, and remedial education. That figure reflects only benefits to the public at large, without even taking into account participants' higher lifetime earnings and contributions to economic growth. Researchers wondered whether a large-scale, public program could generate the same results as a small, experimental program. A landmark study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* focused on the federally financed Title I Chicago Child-Parent Center Program, following its participants until age 21 and found similar social and economic benefits—far exceeding the program's costs.

In short, high-quality early learning sets the stage for success in school and life and generates sustained long-term payoffs, beginning at school entry and continuing as children grow into adults and enter the workforce. The stakes are high. Illinois' children will need the best possible preparation to meet the challenges of the world that awaits them. If we truly want our young people to succeed in school and life, we must start early. The earlier high-quality education begins, and the longer that children participate, the better the outcomes.

Taking the Lead

Preschool for All positions Illinois to take the lead in this important national trend. Our state has long been a pioneer in the early childhood field. Our groundbreaking programs and policies have won national recognition. The National Institute for Early Education Research has named Illinois one of five leading states in the prekindergarten arena for the quality of its programs. Illinois has also been acknowledged as a leader for reaching out to families with infants and toddlers to promote healthy child development through programs supported by a portion of early education funds that are set aside exclusively for birth-to-three services. A critical challenge now is to take this quality to greater scale.

Illinois' System Today

Illinois is already helping to finance early care and education arrangements for a large number of young children. In fiscal year 2005 (FY05), 45 percent of three- and four-year-olds (154,000 out of 342,700 preschoolers) were enrolled in government-supported early education and child care programs—including State Prekindergarten (State PreK), Early Childhood Special Education, Head Start, and/or the Child Care Assistance Program.

Of this number, about 67,000 children who are at risk of academic failure attended the State PreK program, with 75,000 expected to participate in FY06. The year 2005 marks the 20th anniversary of State PreK, which is funded through the Illinois State Board of Education's Early Childhood Block Grant. Because of the foundation laid by this important program, many Illinois children already benefit from high-quality early learning.

In addition, some 64,000 infants and toddlers who are at risk of poor outcomes (12 percent of the state's 517,700 children under age three) received services through government-funded child care, home visiting, and family support programs in FY05.

These are solid achievements—but given scientific evidence that high-quality early learning programs build a strong foundation for later learning, we must do more. Here is why:

- **More families who do not now qualify for State PreK want high-quality early education experiences for their preschoolers.** Preschool for All would provide incentives for new providers to participate, expanding access while holding all programs to high standards.
- **More families need services for infants and toddlers who are at risk of poor outcomes.** Preschool for All would reach new families while extending services to those who already receive services.
- **Immigrant families who are negotiating new linguistic and cultural terrain need high-quality programs geared to the needs of their children.** Preschool for All would make focused efforts to expand access in these and other high-need neighborhoods.

- **All families need assurance that the programs their children attend are of high quality.** Preschool for All would increase and standardize program quality across settings statewide.
- **Families who opt for family child care homes need to know that the quality is high.** Preschool for All would introduce innovative models that foster participation by licensed family child care homes.
- **All families need a coherent set of early childhood services that reflect the realities of their lives.** Illinois' families rely on many kinds of early childhood programs with different purposes and schedules. To get both the quality they want for their children and the coverage required by their work schedules, many families have to "mix and match" services from different programs. Preschool for All would blend funding streams and address regulatory conflicts to foster more collaboration and create a more coherent system of early childhood services.

Now is the time to extend the excellence that is available to some young children to all of our preschoolers and families by establishing Preschool for All.

What is Preschool for All?

In 2003, to begin addressing these challenges, Governor Rod Blagojevich and the Illinois General Assembly established the Illinois Early Learning Council, a diverse body of stakeholders charged with expanding and improving early childhood services.

After a year of intensive work involving hundreds of individuals, the Illinois Early Learning Council has developed a set of recommendations that form the foundation for Governor Blagojevich's five-year plan to make Illinois the first state to offer high-quality preschool to all three- and four-year-olds whose families choose to enroll them. The plan would expand services provided through the Early Childhood Block Grant, adding thousands of children to the program and guaranteeing continued quality in the expansion. The plan would also preserve the Block Grant's 11 percent set-aside for programs serving infants and toddlers from birth to age three.

Staffed by certified teachers who hold bachelor's degrees and specialized training in early education, Preschool for All would provide at least two and a half hours of high-quality programming designed to foster the full spectrum of skills—social, emotional, physical, and cognitive—that all young children need to achieve success in school and in later life. To meet the scheduling needs and preferences of families, Preschool for All would build on and be incorporated into existing programs that would receive the assistance and funding they need to meet high-quality standards, as well as support the creation of new programs in communities. Thus, Preschool for All would enable every community to offer high-quality preschool in a variety of settings, including public and private schools, child care centers and licensed family child care homes, private preschools, park districts, faith-based organizations, and other community-based agencies.

Preschool for All would also improve access to early learning opportunities for children under the age of three who are at greatest risk of later school failure by improving the quality of existing services and expanding capacity. This emphasis on the first years of life is an important element of Preschool for All. Most of the brain's growth occurs in the first three years of life, laying the foundation for healthy cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development that are fundamental to learning. While good early experiences help the brain to develop well, poor early experiences can impede the ability of an otherwise healthy child to achieve his or her full potential. Through Preschool for All, more infants and toddlers and vulnerable families would benefit from programs that provide home and/or center-based comprehensive, intensive services that promote early learning, foster optimal child development, and support parents as their children's first teachers.

Who Supports the Concept of Preschool for All?

Illinois has nearly one million children from birth to age five. To every parent, their child is one in a million, with unique qualities, talents, and needs. Every day, Illinois parents strive to put their children first by seeking access to State PreK programs, signing up for child care subsidies or paying for the best private program they can afford. Preschool for All recognizes this basic family value and would provide all Illinois families opportunities now available only to some. Yet support for Preschool for All extends far beyond its natural core constituency of parents:

- *Researchers* say that high-quality early learning programs, including large-scale public programs, have long-term effects on children's success in school and in life.
- *Chief state school officers* say that high-quality early education is a key to efforts to improve achievement in elementary and secondary schools and reduce the need for costly remediation.
- *Teachers' organizations* have called for voluntary prekindergarten programs for all families.
- *Economists* say that investment in high-quality preschool is sound policy, paying significant dividends throughout a child's school years and beyond.
- *Business leaders*, concerned about our nation's competitive edge in a global marketplace, have issued an urgent call for voluntary, universal preschool.
- *Physicians and public health experts* have called for high-quality early care and education for all as a strategy for improving young children's health and promoting their development and learning.
- *Law enforcement groups* stand squarely behind universal preschool as a strategy for reducing crime and preventing child abuse.

The Cornerstones of Preschool for All

1. ACCESS FOR ALL:

Given what we know about the role of the early years in school success, access for all children is a matter of equal opportunity. It is the right thing to do and it is achievable. Preschool for All would make preschool accessible to all families, serving all three- and four-year-olds who choose to participate, including children with special needs and English language learners, as well as serve children under age three who are at risk of school failure.

2. QUALITY FOR ALL:

Preschool for All is designed to provide high-quality settings for all children, based on the guiding principles of Illinois' Birth to Three Program Standards and Early Learning Standards. Preschool for All would require high staff qualifications, create a pipeline for qualified staff, and support ongoing learning by educators and administrators; ensure high-quality learning environments; use proven, research-based preschool curricula as well as program models for infants, toddlers and their families; monitor adherence to standards; and evaluate results.

3. ATTENTION TO ALL ASPECTS OF SCHOOL READINESS:

To give children the best possible shot at success, Preschool for All needs to connect with and support all of the contexts where children learn, beginning with the family. Preschool for All would provide parent education, engagement, and family support; ease transitions from home, child care, or birth-to-three services to preschool and from preschool to kindergarten; address the physical, social, emotional, and unique developmental needs of individual children; and offer intensive services for children at high risk of school failure.

4. BUILDING ON ALL WE'VE ACCOMPLISHED:

Illinois is fortunate to draw on a solid foundation of early learning programs and well-qualified providers across the state. Preschool for All would mean replicating and expanding our best programs, while helping promising programs meet higher standards. Preschool for All would allow families to choose from a wide range of settings; improve linkage and integration with child care; build on our existing infrastructure by enhancing training and technical assistance, monitoring and evaluation, consultation to promote social and emotional development, and information technology; and encourage local community collaborations to link and coordinate services for young children and their families.

Putting the Pieces Together

At full implementation, Preschool for All would serve an estimated 190,000 children whose parents choose to participate. The Illinois Early Learning Council's Preschool for All recommendations are comprehensive and based on the best research and practices in the field of early childhood education. However, an initiative of this magnitude cannot be realized overnight. Given the critical role that well-trained teachers play in fostering school readiness, perhaps the greatest challenge is ensuring an adequate supply of qualified preschool teachers to conduct rich learning activities that address each child's needs. The Governor and General Assembly could build Preschool for All over time, gradually adding new quality components and extending services to more children. Each new investment would add value and bring important benefits to Illinois' children and families.

BUILDING NEW CAPACITY: With adequate funding, the Council recommends that Preschool for All be constructed over five years, building on Illinois' longstanding commitment to serve children who are at risk of school failure and their families first. However, providers in all communities could apply to begin serving children and families in Year 1. Which program components would be implemented first? While all of the quality components were considered important, there was wide consensus on the Illinois Early Learning Council that program quality rests most heavily on efforts to guarantee high qualifications for staff, particularly lead teachers and program directors; improve staff preparation; and provide excellent ongoing professional development. The Council also identified among its top priorities for initial implementation the need for consultation services by experts who assist preschool staff to evaluate and promote children's social and emotional development and manage difficult behaviors in the classroom; ongoing staff training in program content and administrative areas; and program and financial quality assurance monitoring and evaluation.

FUNDING: Many programs and services for young children already exist in our state, and significant funding streams already flow into them. Preschool for All monies would supplement, not replace, these existing funding streams. Most Preschool for All funding would pay for direct services. Providers would be able to apply for funding based on the type, frequency, and intensity of services they provide. Preschool for All funding would also support infrastructure components necessary to ensure that services are of high quality in order to produce school readiness results.

FORGING A COORDINATED EARLY LEARNING SYSTEM: The state and federal governments already support an array of services for Illinois children from birth to age five, financed through diverse funding streams. But these programs reach only some children. Preschool for All complements and transforms these systems in the interest of a larger good—an excellent early learning system with sufficient capacity to help every child fulfill his or her promise. Preschool for All funds would support new programs as well as be added to existing early childhood programs that choose to comply with a consistent set of quality standards for all providers. These steps would move Illinois toward a single, integrated early learning system that families can understand and easily access.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATION: Building an early learning system requires the participation of people and organizations from all walks of life. Engaging all stakeholders in a community is a key challenge. To maximize community resources and promote partnerships, the monitoring process would review evidence of community collaboration in planning and service provision. Over the longer term, Preschool for All would also establish local community collaborations to foster partnerships at the local level between schools, early care and education providers, child care resource and referral agencies, colleges and universities, businesses, government, service groups, and parents. These local community collaborations would distribute information about available services, enhance service coordination and resource sharing, ensure successful transitions between settings, identify gaps in services and local infrastructure needs, and measure progress.

We Have Made a Strong Start— But We Can and We Must Do Better

In Illinois, our strong State PreK program serves tens of thousands of children across the state who are at risk of school failure. Despite difficult budget environments, over the past three years, Governor Blagojevich and the General Assembly have recognized the value of early education by increasing funding for State PreK by \$90 million so that up to 25,000 more at-risk children can participate. In addition, the Governor and General Assembly expanded family eligibility for the Child Care Assistance Program to help 11,000 more families pay for child care.

But we can't stop there. We can and we must do better—the children and their parents are counting on us. Too many are on waiting lists or do not qualify for preschool programs. And too many children whose families pay for programs spend their days in settings of mediocre or poor quality. In coming decades, our civic institutions and workplaces will need the participation and productivity of all Illinoisans. That is why we make public investments in education. Researchers have unquestionably proven what many parents and educators have been saying for years—the preschool years matter. Now we must begin that investment sooner.

Preschool for All is a sound economic investment. The evidence is overwhelming that early childhood education pays financial dividends by reducing future costs for special education and other forms of remediation. By making greater investments in early education, our state can increase the odds that the billions of dollars we spend on K-12 education will have the greatest, most positive impact.

It is also the right thing to do. Preschool for All is a matter of fairness. We expect a great deal of our children. We owe it to them—to *all* of them—to provide the best possible start in life.







Why Preschool for All?

Illinois has long been a pioneer in the early childhood field. Our groundbreaking programs and policies have won national recognition. In fiscal year 2006, our State Prekindergarten program (State PreK), which is funded through the Early Childhood Block Grant, will serve 75,000 three- and four-year-olds who are at risk of academic failure. The National Institute for Early Education Research has named Illinois one of five leading states in the prekindergarten arena for the quality of its programs.¹ Illinois has also been acknowledged as a leader for its commitment to its youngest children. Eleven percent of the state's early childhood education funding is dedicated to serve infants, toddlers, and their families. The challenge now is to take this quality to greater scale.

Children Ages Birth to Age Five Served in Illinois Early Childhood Programs

	Total number of children 2005 Census Data	Total served in FY2005
Birth to Three	517,737	63,902 (12%)
Three to Five	342,699	154,359 (45%)
Birth to Five	860,436	218,261 (25%)

Thanks to these earlier foundation-building efforts, many Illinois children already benefit from quality early learning. But thousands of children do not qualify for State PreK, and many who do are on waiting lists. Now is the time to extend the excellence that is available to some young children to all of our preschoolers and families by establishing Preschool for All.

In 2003, Governor Rod Blagojevich and the Illinois General Assembly established the Illinois Early Learning Council, a diverse body of stakeholders charged with expanding and improving early childhood services. After a year of intensive work involving hundreds of individuals, the Illinois Early Learning Council has developed a plan for making high-quality early childhood education services available to ALL children and families across the state who want to participate. This report outlines the major aspects of this plan for a bold new initiative called Preschool for All.

Preschool for All is designed to expand access to high-quality early learning programs for all Illinois preschoolers age three to five whose families choose to enroll them. Staffed by certified teachers who have bachelor's degrees and specialized training in early education, the program would foster the full spectrum of skills—social, emotional, physical, and cognitive—that prepare young children to achieve in school and in later life. Preschool for All would also support early learning opportunities for children under the age of three who are at risk of later school failure aimed at helping them thrive today and succeed tomorrow.

Why Now?

Across the nation, Americans are rethinking early education. We are shifting from a focus on child care as a support for working parents to a more complete recognition that quality early learning can be a powerful strategy to strengthen education and close the achievement gap. We are moving from a system of education that begins with kindergarten to one that starts much earlier, based on scientific understanding of how children develop and learn. We are moving from a model based on entitlement for some families to the notion that early learning opportunities should be available for all. Most states now provide state-financed prekindergarten for at least some of their three- and four-year-olds. Annual spending for these programs nationally tops \$1.9 billion. Several states are moving toward giving all families access to high-quality preschool. Because Illinois can build on a solid foundation of successful programs, we have a unique opportunity to take the lead in this important national trend.

The movement toward Preschool for All reflects important new insights into the way children learn and the kinds of early experiences that raise the odds of school success. In recent years, scores of experts—from educators and economists to behavioral researchers and brain scientists—have shown the wisdom of public investment in high-quality early childhood education programs. Research demonstrates how early experiences affect children's brain development and how brain development, in turn, shapes lifelong learning. Studies have shown how high-quality early learning programs support later achievement. In particular, they have amassed evidence that children who participate in high-quality preschool programs make better progress in language, math, and social skills than their peers who have missed the opportunity. Studies also show that the earlier the interventions begin and the longer that children participate, the better the outcomes.

The stakes are high. Illinois' children will need the best possible preparation to meet the challenges of the world that awaits them. If we truly want our young people to succeed in school and life, we must start early.

Why Here?

Illinois is already helping to finance early care and education arrangements for a large number of young children. In fiscal year 2005 (FY05), 45 percent of three- and four-year-olds (154,000 out of 342,700 preschoolers) were enrolled in government-supported early education and child care programs—including State PreK, Early Childhood Special Education, Head Start, and/or the Child Care Assistance Program.

Of this number, about 67,000 children who are at risk of academic failure attended Illinois' State PreK program, with 75,000 expected to participate in FY06. The year 2005 marks the 20th anniversary of State PreK in Illinois. Because of the foundation laid by this important program, many Illinois children already benefit from high-quality early learning.

In addition, some 64,000 infants and toddlers who are at risk of poor outcomes (12 percent of the state's 517,700 children under age three) received services through government-funded child care, home visiting, and family support programs.

How Are We Serving Infants and Toddlers?

Program	Children served (birth to age three)	FY2005 Funding
Early Head Start	2,691	\$22,947,127
Healthy Families Illinois ^a	4,938	\$20,569,300
ISBE Early Childhood Block Grant	8,589 ^b	\$26,840,000
Child Care Assistance Program	48,540	\$147,500,000
Unduplicated Total	63,902*	\$217,856,427

*Children who receive more than one type of service are counted in the total only once (856 infants and toddlers receive Early Head Start and Child Care Assistance Program services).

How Are We Serving Preschoolers?

Program	Children served (ages three to five)	FY2005 Funding
State Prekindergarten	67,000	\$217,200,000
Early Childhood Special Education	17,717	\$18,000,000 (federal funds only)
Head Start	36,578	\$240,745,316
Child Care Assistance Program	45,617	\$183,800,000
Unduplicated Total	154,359*	\$659,745,316

*Children who receive more than one type of service are counted in the total only once (12,553 preschoolers receive State PreK and/or Head Start and Child Care Assistance Program services).

- a Includes Healthy Families and Parents Too Soon programs
b Prevention Initiative only

These are solid achievements—but given scientific evidence that high-quality early learning programs build a strong foundation for later learning, we must do more. Here is why:

- **More families who do not now qualify for State PreK need high-quality early education experiences for their preschoolers.** Thousands of preschoolers do not currently qualify for State PreK. Many parents report that they have few good choices when they search for quality preschool programs in their communities. Programs that are available are often unaffordable. Preschool for All would provide incentives for new providers to participate, expanding access while holding all programs to high standards.
- **More families need services for infants and toddlers who are at risk of poor outcomes.** Many families are not receiving services despite their young children's risk factors; others already participate but need a wider range of services to foster their children's healthy development. Preschool for All would reach new families and enhance the quality and breadth of services offered by many existing programs.
- **Immigrant families who are negotiating new linguistic and cultural terrain need high-quality programs geared to the needs of their children.** In Chicago and in many cities and suburbs across the state, rapid population growth in Latino communities has far outstripped the capacity of local programs. Preschool for All would make focused efforts to expand access in these and other high-need neighborhoods.

- **All families need assurance that the programs their children attend are of high quality.** As we expand access, our state can do more to raise the quality of all early childhood services. We can do more to ensure consistency and promote equity. Currently, depending on their funding source, programs are held to different regulations in areas such as family and provider eligibility, teacher requirements, hours of service, parent fees, curriculum, and assessment. Many programs lack the resources needed to put into place all of the building blocks of school readiness identified by researchers. Preschool for All would increase and standardize program quality across settings statewide.
- **Families who opt for family child care homes need to know that the quality is high.** Many families prefer home-based settings for their young children and choose family child care homes. Quality improvement efforts tend to focus on center-based programs. Preschool for All would introduce innovative models that foster participation by licensed family child care homes.
- **All families need a coherent set of early childhood services that reflect the realities of their lives.** As they try to arrange early care and education for their children, Illinois families often contend with a fragmented system that encompasses many kinds of programs, including Head Start, State PreK, and child care. Some operate for a half-day, some correspond to the school day, and others extend to cover the full workday. To get the combination of quality and coverage they need for their children, many working families have to "mix and match" services from different programs. Preschool for All would create a more coherent set of services by blending funding streams, ensuring consistent quality standards, and taking steps toward coordinating different kinds of early childhood services—including home-based providers (licensed family child care providers as well as family, friends, and neighbors in license-exempt homes).

Why Preschool?

HIGH-QUALITY PRESCHOOL RAISES THE ODDS THAT INVESTMENTS IN K-12 EDUCATION WILL PAY OFF:

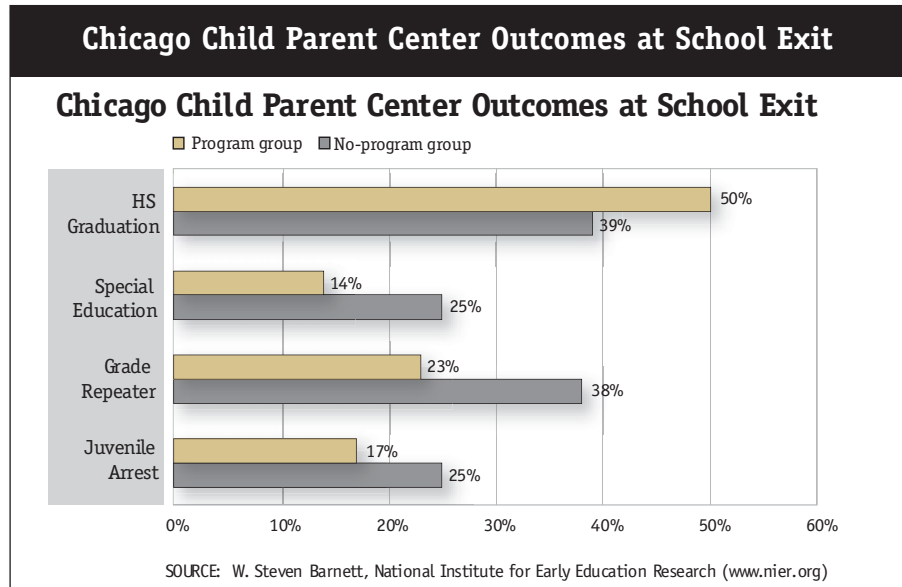
As a state we invest heavily in K-12 education—more than \$9.1 billion each year. But public investments in education will not fully pay off if we wait until children reach kindergarten before focusing on their optimal development and learning.

Teachers are well aware of early education's benefits. The National Education Association has called on federal and state governments to make voluntary prekindergarten programs a reality for all families, with standards and professional credentialing systems that align with K-12 education.² After conducting a comprehensive 50-state review of early education programs and policies, the American Federation of Teachers urged public support for state implementation of high-quality universal early childhood education.³

Preschool for all three- and four-year-olds has also been endorsed by the states' chief education officers—the individuals most responsible for elementary and secondary education. A policy statement by the Council of Chief State School Officers emphasizes that, "efforts to reform and strengthen K-12 education cannot succeed without a concerted effort to support the people and improve the programs entrusted with the care and education of our youngest children."⁴ These officials realize that preschool is expensive, but they also know that children who attend high-quality preschool programs are less likely to need special education and other costly interventions later on.

This finding rests on a large body of research, including a landmark study of early education conducted in Illinois and published in the prestigious *Journal of the American Medical Association* (JAMA). Earlier research had shown that small, experimental programs of high quality have a lasting impact on participants' learning and life skills. The researchers wanted to know whether large-scale early learning programs could promote children's long-term success as well.

The JAMA study followed children who participated in the Chicago Child-Parent Center Program through high school graduation. It showed that such programs can indeed have long-term, positive effects on participants' achievement and prospects—if the programs are held to high-quality standards. The evaluation found that the longer the children were in the program and the younger children were when they entered, the higher the rates of high school completion and the lower the rates of juvenile arrest, school drop out, grade retention, and special education services.⁵



HIGH-QUALITY PRESCHOOL IS SOUND ECONOMIC POLICY: These are challenging times. Even in tight budget years, it is imperative to make early education one of our highest priorities because such investments pay significant dividends throughout a child's school years and beyond. James Heckman, a Nobel Laureate in economics from the University of Chicago, has found that the greatest return on investment comes from high-quality programs that serve the very young because early learning and early success prepare the way for sustained long-term payoffs, first upon school entry and later in the labor market.⁶ The cost-benefit analysis of longitudinal data from the Chicago Child-Parent Center study found that for every \$1 spent on high-quality early education, \$7 was returned to the public, the government, and the participants themselves. Most recently, Federal Reserve Bank economist Art Rolnick calculated the rate of return for investment in preschool education at 16 percent.⁷

As we meet new economic and civic demands, Illinois needs each generation's full complement of ideas, energies, and skills. Among our nation's 50 states, Illinois is seventh for overall number of high-tech workers,⁸ and in future decades the demand for well-educated workers will only increase. As the Brookings Institution's Isabelle Sawhill has written, "Making today's children more productive and better able to use emerging technologies can create a much stronger economy than investing all of our resources in financial capital."⁹

Based on these considerations, the Committee for Economic Development (CED), a national group representing corporate leaders, has made an urgent call for universal preschool. According to the CED, "It is time for the United States to acknowledge society's stake in and responsibility for early education, as it long has for older children, by making publicly-funded prekindergarten available to all preschool children whose parents want them to enroll."¹⁰

Closer to home, Illinois business leaders are increasingly taking a stand for quality early learning. The recently released report, *The Economic Impact of the Early Care and Education Industry in Illinois*, highlights early care and education as a crucial Illinois industry. The report recommends expansion of access and quality to a system that already generates \$2.1 billion in receipts, supports 56,000 full-time employees, and contributes to the broader economy by enabling parents to work and preparing the workforce of tomorrow.¹¹

HIGH-QUALITY PRESCHOOL PROMOTES PUBLIC HEALTH: A January 2005 policy statement by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) states that high-quality early care and education experiences improve young children's health and promotes their development and learning. According to the AAP, "Children who attend high-quality early childhood programs demonstrate better math and language skills, better cognition and social skills, better interpersonal relationships, and better behavioral self-regulation than do children in lower-quality care."¹²

HIGH-QUALITY PRESCHOOL FOSTERS PUBLIC SAFETY: The long-term social benefits of high-quality early learning programs include lower arrest rates for participants when they reach the teen years. For this reason, law enforcement groups like the Illinois chapter of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids stand squarely behind universal preschool. Fight Crime: Invest in Kids is a national organization whose members—more than 2,000 police chiefs, sheriffs, prosecutors, and crime survivors—are dedicated to preventing crime and violence by investing in high-quality early learning programs like Preschool for All. Law enforcement leaders in Illinois and other states such as Arkansas, Maine, New Mexico, Ohio, Oregon, and Tennessee have released state reports on the importance of high-quality prekindergarten in the effort to reduce crime and prevent child abuse.¹³

Why For All?

In Illinois, our strong State PreK program serves tens of thousands of children across the state who are at risk of school failure. Over the past three years, Governor Blagojevich has increased funding for State PreK—despite historic state budget deficits—so that 25,000 more at-risk children could participate. In addition, the Governor and General Assembly expanded family eligibility for the Child Care Assistance Program to help 11,000 more families pay for child care.

But we can't stop there. We can and must do better—the children and their parents are counting on us. Too many children do not qualify for government-funded early education programs. Additionally, too many families pay for programs where children spend their days in settings of mediocre or poor quality. The problems of poor school readiness and student achievement are not limited to low-income children. Many middle-income children—particularly those from families in the lower portion of middle income—cannot afford to attend the limited number of high-quality preschool programs, and as a result, often start school unprepared. Studies indicate that among families with incomes between \$30,000 and \$75,000, just 50 percent of children ages three and four are enrolled in preschool compared to 74 percent of those whose families have incomes of \$75,000 or above.¹⁴ In coming decades, our civic institutions and workplaces will need the participation and productivity of all Illinoisans. That is why we make public investments in education. Now that researchers have proven that the preschool years matter, we need to begin that investment before kindergarten.

This Report

This report provides an overview of the Illinois Early Learning Council's recommendations for preschool expansion, which form the foundation of Governor Blagojevich's Preschool for All plan. More detail is available from the Illinois Early Learning Council at <http://www.illinois.gov/gov/elc>. Part 2 focuses on the four cornerstones of Preschool for All. In the process, it lays out the program's key components and explains why each one is important, based on the most recent research evidence. Part 3, "Putting the Pieces Together," describes how program implementation could work and provides options for building Preschool for All over time. It shows what Preschool for All would mean for families, providers, communities, and our state as a whole.



Ten Reasons to Support Preschool for All

1

Preschool for All means services for all. The State PreK program serves many children, but more than 10,000 eligible preschoolers are on waiting lists. And many more children do not qualify. Working families with moderate incomes have the fewest early learning options because they earn too much for subsidized programs, but can't afford high-quality private programs.

2

Preschool for All means benefits for all. As Yale Professor and early childhood expert Edward Zigler has said, "The evidence is fairly clear now that poor children aren't the only ones who lack school readiness."¹⁵ And as children move through the grades, underachievement affects all communities and income groups. For example, national studies show that middle-income children have unacceptably high rates of repeating grades (12%) and dropping out of high school (11%). Participation in high-quality preschool programs has been shown to help students avoid these problems.¹⁶

3

Preschool for All means quality for all. Children from higher-income families have more access to early learning programs than poor children, but the quality is not necessarily high. And children from lower-income families qualify for publicly funded programs, but those programs are not held to the high Preschool for All quality standards. For example, Preschool for All would add the funding needed to support certified lead teachers with bachelor's degrees in child care programs, which lack the funding needed to hire teachers with four-year degrees.

4

Preschool for All means high standards for all. When every preschooler is entitled to services, and programs in all types of settings (for-profit, non-profit, public school, etc.) are held to the same high standards, it is possible to replace a fragmented, inefficient system with one that keeps a steady focus on quality. Moreover, Preschool for All makes better use of dollars now spent to determine and monitor eligibility.

5

Preschool for All means continuity for all. When a family's economic circumstances change, affecting its entitlement status, children could stay in the same program rather than moving to a different setting or losing the opportunity to attend preschool altogether. When a family moves, children could transfer to another program that has the same key assumptions and quality standards.

6

Preschool for All means peace of mind for all working families. Most preschoolers have no parent at home during the day. Enrollment trends show that we are swiftly moving toward preschool for all whether we plan for it or not. If we do plan for it, we can ensure that programs have the high quality that has been shown to promote school readiness and later achievement.

7

Preschool for All means a better-informed public—especially consumers. A program for all families is likely to spark broader public discussion of early education. More talk and media coverage can lead to better understanding of the benefits of preschool and keener insight into what quality looks like.

8

Preschool for All encourages wider participation by high-need families. It removes the red tape caused by eligibility requirements as well as the stigma associated with targeted programs. It encourages participation by children from diverse ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds, as well as those with and without disabilities.

9

Preschool for All holds promise for greater long-term impact. If all the children in a local elementary school have attended high-quality preschool programs, the school's overall academic and social climate may be better, fostering stronger achievement. Once the effects of preschool permeate a community, the overall quality of life may improve. Such changes would reinforce the benefits of children's preschool experiences. As one study has found, "Even relatively small pervasive changes could produce much larger benefits if they push schools and communities past their 'tipping points' where the rates of school behavior problems or crime rapidly decline."

10

Preschool for All is more likely to endure. Preschool for All would extend access to high-quality early education to a greater number of children, and therefore costs more than targeted programs. Given that more families would reap this benefit, Preschool for All may well garner wider public support than targeted programs.

Source: W. Steven Barnett, Kirsty Brown, and Rima Shore, "The Universal vs. Targeted Debate: Should the United States Have Preschool for All?" *Preschool Policy Matters*, National Institute for Early Education Research, Issue 6/April 2004.





The Cornerstones of Preschool for All

Preschool for All is an ambitious undertaking. The blueprint has been carefully drawn, showing the program's many building blocks and how they fit together. Families and providers have been consulted, and many experts and organizations have contributed to the plan. There is wide agreement about the cornerstones for a quality program: 1) Access for all; 2) Quality for all; 3) Attention to all aspects of school readiness; and 4) Building on all we've accomplished.

1. ACCESS FOR ALL

Given what researchers have learned about the role of high-quality preschool in preparing children for school success, access for all children is a matter of fairness that ensures each child the opportunity to acquire the foundational skills he or she needs for future academic success. It is the right thing to do and it is achievable. We can ensure that every family has access to at least 12.5 hours per week of voluntary, high-quality preschool, which the Chicago Child-Parent Center and High/Scope Perry Preschool studies demonstrated was effective in boosting achievement.

Serve all three- and four-year-olds on a voluntary basis

Preschool for All would serve all preschoolers (ages 3 to 5) whose families want to enroll them. Participation in Preschool for All would be strictly voluntary. Extensive research shows that starting earlier benefits children both directly (by offering a more intensive, sustained educational experience) and indirectly (by helping us introduce parents sooner to activities and approaches based on key principles of child development).¹⁷ Many eminent national bodies have called for universal, voluntary preschool, including the Carnegie Task Force on Learning in the Primary Grades, the Council of Chief State School Officers, and the Committee for Economic Development.

Serve children under age three who are at risk of school failure

Children are born learning. Dr. Craig Ramey's Abecedarian Project and the Syracuse Family Development Research Program have demonstrated that interventions beginning at birth have a long-lasting impact on children's success in school and life.¹⁸ Program effects have been largest for children from families with multiple poverty-related factors that put them at risk of school failure. Based on this research and the need to target limited resources, families with at-risk infants and toddlers would be eligible for high-quality prevention programs through Preschool for All. These programs would provide home and/or center-based comprehensive and intensive services to promote early learning, foster optimal child development, and support parents as their children's first teachers. Some children already receive such services. Preschool for All would expand availability so more young children and vulnerable families could have access to services.

Make preschool programs accessible to all families

Programs would provide at least 12.5 hours of preschool instruction, with a maximum of 5 days per week. Parents could choose to send their children for less time (3 or 4 days per week), or they could arrange to extend a child's day using their own funds or a child care subsidy if they qualify.

Include children with special needs

Preschool for All programs would be appropriate for the age, developmental level, and special needs of each child, and would serve children with Individualized Education Plans.

Serve non-English-speaking children and families

Many children in Illinois grow up in families whose primary language is not English. For example, Spanish is the home language of one in three Chicago children and one in seven children statewide. In today's preschool environment, teachers are working with an increasingly diverse population of young students, including many who come from homes where English is not spoken.¹⁹ Preschool for All programs would serve children with limited English proficiency. Programs would support and develop these children's emergent English literacy while also providing an environment that fosters and preserves the primary language.

2. QUALITY FOR ALL

The science on early learning is clear.²⁰ High-quality programs not only help children thrive today; they foster success tomorrow—in school and in life.²¹ Researchers have found that quality matters in many ways. Children appear happier and more engaged in settings where caregivers interact with them positively and where adult-child ratios are higher. Children who attend higher-quality settings (measured in terms of program and caregiver characteristics, age-appropriate activities, and facilities) show better cognitive, language, and social competencies on standardized tests; and are given higher ratings in these areas by parents, teachers, and expert observers.

For these reasons, Preschool for All is designed to provide high-quality settings for all children. Efforts to strengthen and assure quality are based on the guiding principles of Illinois' Birth to Three Program Standards and Early Learning Standards, which are aligned with the K-12 Learning Standards. [See *Sidebar: Illinois Early Learning Standards: Guiding Principles on page 13*]. These standards describe the knowledge and skills that young children are expected to master. The idea is to use standards to improve the odds that preschool programs will boost school readiness and build a solid foundation for later achievement.

Require high staff qualifications

Research has shown that competent and well-trained educators and caregivers are the most significant component of high quality in early learning programs. Young children learn more and are better prepared for school when their teachers and caregivers have higher levels of formal education, specialized training in early childhood education, adequate compensation and longevity on the job. In Preschool for All, lead teachers in state-funded programs will continue to be required to hold teacher certification in early childhood education, which calls for a four-year college degree and specialized training in early childhood education.

Illinois Early Learning Standards: Guiding Principles

Early learning and development are multidimensional and interrelated.

How children develop in one area of their learning influences development in other domains. For example, a child's language skills affect his or her ability to engage in social interactions. Therefore, early learning must be viewed as a "big picture" issue—developmental domains cannot be considered in isolation from each other. The dynamic interaction of all areas of development must be considered. Standards and benchmarks listed for each domain could also be cited in different domains.

Young children are capable and competent.

All children are capable of positive developmental outcomes. There should be high expectations for all young children, regardless of their backgrounds and experience.

Children are individuals who develop at different rates.

Each child is unique. Each grows and develops skills and competencies at their own pace. Some children may have a developmental delay or disability that may require program staff members to adapt expectations or experiences so that individual children can successfully achieve a particular benchmark.

Children possess a range of skills and competencies in any domain of development.

All children within an age group should not be expected to arrive at each benchmark at the same time or to show mastery to the same degree of proficiency.

Children need clear, developmentally appropriate educational expectations.

Early care and education program staff members must agree on what they expect children to know and be able to do within the context of child growth and development. With this knowledge, early childhood staff members can make sound decisions about appropriate curriculum for the group and for individual children.

Young children learn through active exploration of their environment in child-initiated and teacher-selected activities.

Early childhood educators recognize that children's play is a highly supportive context for development and learning. The early childhood environment should provide opportunities for children to explore materials, engage in activities and interact with peers and adults to construct their own understanding of the world around them. There should, therefore, be a balance of child-initiated and teacher-initiated activities to maximize learning.

Families are the primary caregivers and educators of young children.

Families should be aware of programmatic goals, experiences that should be provided for children and expectations for their performance by the end of the preschool years. Program staff members and families should work collaboratively to ensure that children are provided optimal learning experiences.

Source: Illinois State Board of Education Division of Early Childhood Education. Available at: <http://www.illinoisearlylearning.org/standards/index.htm>



Create a pipeline of qualified staff

Full implementation of Preschool for All would require many more qualified teachers than Illinois now has—even if some former teachers could be attracted back to the field. Meeting the estimated need for 2,000 more teachers with bachelor's degrees and specialized training in early education in the coming years, particularly in hard-to-serve communities, would require additional investments in our state's professional development system. About 1,600 child care and Head Start teachers have baccalaureate degrees and significant teaching experience but lack early childhood teacher certification. Many more have 2-year associate degrees. Most would need to work full-time while attending school and could not afford to pay full tuition or complete unpaid student teaching assignments.

For Preschool for All to be successful, new investments in the professional development of the workforce are critical. This would include: additional scholarships; expanded early childhood teacher preparation programs, including alternative certification programs; and training for bilingual educators who are reflective of Illinois' increasingly culturally diverse population.



Support ongoing learning by teachers and other staff

Every Preschool for All program would have a comprehensive professional development plan that would cover all aspects of staff recruitment, preparation, and ongoing professional development. The plan would specify the kinds of supervision, mentoring, and learning opportunities to be offered to staff members. It would show how colleges and universities would be involved in professional preparation and development activities.



Utilize proven, research-based curricula

When programs use research-based curricula, children learn more and are better prepared to successfully master the complex demands of formal schooling. Preschool for All programs would be required to choose an approved, proven curriculum that is well-designed, comprehensive, and aligned with Illinois Early Learning Standards and Head Start standards. Curricula and classroom routines would reflect children's varied backgrounds and take into account each child's interests, special needs, and cultural and linguistic experiences.



Utilize proven, research-based program models for infants, toddlers and their families

Quality would be the hallmark of Preschool for All infant and toddler programs. To ensure that organizations are providing services of the type and intensity that have been shown to achieve positive results with very young children and their families, programs would be required to implement research-based program models that have demonstrated success through rigorous evaluation. These models address program elements such as intensity of services delivered, staff-family ratios, methods and approaches, staff training and qualifications, family involvement and periodic child assessment. As well as funding new programs, existing programs could receive funding to upgrade services and implement a research-based model, and programs already implementing a proven model could apply for funding to provide enhanced services based on demonstrated community need. Additionally, Preschool for All would provide funding for implementation and evaluation of innovative pilot programs with a sound research basis.

Focus on young children's individual needs

Even the best teacher cannot individualize instruction and adequately supervise too large a group of young children. Preschool for All programs would have at least two staff per 20 children. Child assessments would support the learning of individual children by helping teachers and families understand their strengths and needs in many dimensions of development.

Evaluate programs and monitor adherence to standards

Continuous improvement is a core value of Preschool for All. Programs would be evaluated on a regular basis. To ensure adherence to quality standards, Preschool for All would institute a rigorous monitoring process, building on existing monitoring systems to maximize resources and enhance efficiency. The results would be used to create formal program quality improvement plans and to guide the provision of technical assistance and training. Programs would also be monitored to ensure compliance with fiscal requirements. Effective management information systems would be used to support accurate, comprehensive collection and analysis of data.

3. ATTENTION TO ALL ASPECTS OF SCHOOL READINESS

The National Education Goals Panel identified five domains of school readiness:²²

1. Physical well-being and motor development
2. Social and emotional development
3. Approaches to learning (i.e., inclinations, dispositions, or styles toward learning)
4. Language development or communicative skills
5. Cognition and general knowledge

The National Education Goals Panel definition reflects the fact that many kinds of skills and competencies underlie academic success. These skills and competencies go well beyond any preschool curriculum. That is because wherever they are, whatever the hour, whatever they are doing, young children are making developmental leaps. If later achievement depended solely on children's classroom experiences, Preschool for All could overlook all of the other influences on children's school readiness and focus exclusively on program activities. But nothing could be farther from the truth. To give children the best possible shot at success, Preschool for All needs to connect with and support all of the contexts where children learn, beginning with the family. It needs to ensure strong linkages with health and other human service providers as well as a wide range of community organizations.

Address physical development and health

Children who have access to basic health care during the early years are more likely to be ready for kindergarten. Preschool for All programs would help families connect with primary health providers, community health services, or other providers. This would help to ensure that all children receive a full range of appropriate well-child health services, including general health and lead screenings, immunizations, oral health care and hearing and vision screening. They would also work with families to ensure that children are well nourished.

Meet the unique developmental needs of individual children

When problems occur, early intervention is crucial. Yet teachers and parents know it is not always easy to spot problems early in life. Preschool for All programs will meet this challenge by completing a comprehensive developmental screening of each child every year, beginning within 45 days of enrollment. This would help programs meet the developmental needs of individual children and identify children who may be in need of further evaluation for possible developmental delays or disabilities.



Promote social and emotional development

Illinois' Early Learning Standards emphasize social and emotional development, expecting that young children will "develop an awareness of personal identity and positive self-concept," and "demonstrate a respect and responsibility for self and others." The standards stress children's ability to function as individuals and as members of groups.²³ All children meet bumps in the road on the journey toward social and emotional competence. But many face steeper obstacles. These children need the support of well-prepared teachers who have the knowledge and tools to promote social and emotional development and manage difficult classroom behaviors. Preschool for All programs would be able to apply for funding for ongoing consultation (8-20 hours per month for every 4-6 classrooms) with qualified mental health professionals who would have to meet standards set by Preschool for All.



Ease transitions between settings

Preschool for All would promote the consistency and continuity that children need to adjust and learn as they move from one setting to another, whether from home to preschool or from preschool to kindergarten. Every program would have a plan to ease children's transition from home, child care, or other early childhood services to preschool, as well as from preschool to elementary school. Particular attention would be paid to transition into or out of special education. The transition plan would include specific activities that have been shown to help children and families make a good adjustment. For example, it might recommend joint workshops for preschool teachers and kindergarten teachers at local elementary schools. Or it might call for staff-parent meetings to plan for a child's transition from home to school or from one classroom to another. Staff would receive special training related to working effectively with families and easing transitions.

4. BUILDING ON ALL WE'VE ACCOMPLISHED

Expanding access and quality to all families starts with building on success. Illinois is fortunate to draw on a solid foundation of quality early learning programs and well-qualified providers across the state. To implement Preschool for All, we would need to increase the number of openings in good programs. That would mean replicating and expanding our best programs, while helping promising programs meet higher Preschool for All standards. The goal is to expand access to high-quality programs while valuing the characteristics that have been important to families in the past: a wide range of settings, diversity among providers, a location convenient to home or work, and cultural competency.



Allow families to choose from a wide range of settings and schedules

Preschool for All would empower families with a range of choices among high-quality programs and settings, including child care centers, family child care homes, Head Start sites, and schools. Preschool for All funding would be available to a wide variety of organizations, including public and private schools, child care centers and licensed family child care homes, private preschools, park districts, faith-based organizations, and other community-based agencies. Families would know that when they choose a Preschool for All program, they could count on at least 12.5 hours per week of high-quality preschool at no additional cost to them.



Expand good programs

Illinois is home to many wonderful early learning programs. Many have made strenuous efforts to improve quality. Some have met the rigorous accreditation standards established by the National Association for the Education of Young Children or other accrediting bodies. Some are currently blending Head Start or State PreK funds with child care funds to make full-workday, year-round, high-quality early care and education services available to children whose parents work or attend school.

Whenever feasible, Preschool for All would seek to expand high-quality programs, extending their services to more children and families. It is crucial to do so without changing the staffing ratios, group sizes, and other program characteristics that have led to their success.

Help good programs get even better

Preschool for All would be incorporated into local programs, which would receive the assistance and funding they need to meet high-quality standards (for example, hiring bachelor-level teachers). Many children of low-income working parents would receive Preschool for All services in full-workday, year-round child care centers and homes. Preschool for All would enhance the educational component of the services that children are currently receiving. The Illinois Department of Human Services, in consultation with its Child Care and Development Advisory Council, recently submitted a comprehensive plan to the General Assembly to revise provider reimbursement rates in its Child Care Assistance Program. These rates have not been raised in nearly five years despite substantial increases in program operating costs. The plan to raise child care rates and to implement a tiered reimbursement system that provides financial incentives for higher-quality services should be adopted as a critical step toward improving a family's access to—and the quality of—early care and education. Coordinated planning and implementation between Preschool for All and child care programs would increase access and alignment in service quality in all settings.

Build on the existing infrastructure

No classroom is an island. Quality depends not only on what happens in preschool settings, but also on the support and supervision available to programs and the policy and regulatory framework in which they operate. Illinois has invested in many efforts that provide licensing and enforcement, credentialing, technical assistance, professional development, and other forms of support. Preschool for All would build on this existing infrastructure. Every participating provider in every community—whatever the age, educational needs, or eligibility status of the children and families served—would be held to high-quality standards. New infrastructure supports would be incorporated into the Preschool for All budget to ensure that programs can meet the standards. All programs would receive on-site technical assistance, monitoring, and training, and participate in a statewide program evaluation. All would commit to the professional development priorities needed to produce and retain a qualified workforce. Many would have access to consultation to promote social and emotional development, and would take part in local community collaborations. Investments in information technology would facilitate linkages among programs. The Illinois Early Learning Council continues to work on developing options for accessing other government funding sources to support facilities construction, renovation or maintenance as well as transportation.

Improve linkage among programs and integration with child care

Illinois is home to many kinds of early care and education programs, including not only State PreK and Early Childhood Special Education, but also Head Start and child care. From the standpoint of bureaucracies and budgets, these are completely separate programs. But the real lives of children and families know no such boundaries. To get the services and coverage they need, many working families end up cobbling together complex arrangements. One child may spend time in multiple settings, making many transitions during a given week. Or, a family with more than one young child may have to negotiate several programs, each with its own requirements and regulations. Families may have to move from one program to another as their employment or income change. And when they move from one neighborhood to another, families have trouble finding a program with similar services, quality standards, and curricular approach. Illinois has already made strides toward fostering collaboration among programs by addressing some regulatory conflicts and blending funding streams, and these efforts are paying off.

Which providers are eligible to participate?

Eligible providers will include (but not be limited to):

- Charter schools
- Colleges and universities
- Educational cooperative sites
- Family support centers
- Head Start centers
- Hospitals
- Licensed family child care homes*
- Military bases
- Non-profit and for-profit child care centers
- Park districts
- Private schools
- Public school districts
- Religious institutions**
- Social service agencies
- University laboratory schools
- Vocational and technical schools

**Home child care providers (i.e., license-exempt family, friend, and neighbor caregivers) are exempt from state licensing requirements and are not monitored if they care for three or fewer children, including their own, or if all of the children they care for are from the same household. License-exempt family, friend, and neighbor caregivers caring for three or fewer children would not be eligible; however, formal linkages between license-exempt caregivers and Preschool for All programs would be promoted.*

***Religious institutions would be subject to current state restrictions in order to participate in a state-funded education program.*

Many Head Start and child care providers who operated separately in the past are now working together to make full-day, year-round, high-quality services available. Such programs serve more than 10,000 children whose families live in poverty. State PreK services with certified teachers are increasingly delivered in child care and Head Start programs. Some programs share space, staff training, transportation costs, and specialized personnel such as social workers and speech therapists. These types of collaboration would be built into the structure of Preschool for All—not the exception, but the rule. Young children and families need a comprehensive, coherent, flexible 0-5 early learning system—one that serves the twin aims of optimal child development and family support. Preschool for All therefore would strive to eliminate regulatory barriers among programs, provide smooth transitions for children and families among different settings, and link children and families with appropriate services and resources in their communities.

Encourage local community collaborations to link and coordinate services for young children and their families

Children's development and prospects hinge not only on the family and schools they experience, but also on the community resources available to them. To advance children's learning and assist programs and families, Preschool for All would encourage the development of partnerships at the local level between schools, early care and education providers, child care resource and referral agencies, colleges and universities, businesses, government, service groups, and parents. These local community collaborations

would distribute information about organizations and agencies in the community that serve families; foster relationships to enhance service coordination, resource sharing, and ensure successful transitions for children; and identify gaps in services and local infrastructure needs as well as measure progress. In addition, each Preschool for All program would be urged to develop a plan to coordinate and link with other agencies or services in the locality that address the health, welfare, safety, mental health, and social service needs of young children and their families.







Putting the Pieces Together

Illinois has nearly one million children from birth through age five. To every parent, their child is one in a million, with unique qualities, talents, and experiences. Preschool for All recognizes this basic family value and responds by providing all Illinois families opportunities now available only to some.

As the pieces of Preschool for All come together, we must stay focused on the ultimate goal—an early learning system with sufficient capacity to foster the strengths and meet the needs of each and every child. Sufficient capacity means enough knowledge, enough services, enough resources, enough commitment—spread across our state's many and varied communities.

Building New Capacity

At full implementation, Preschool for All would serve an estimated 190,000 children whose parents choose to participate. The Illinois Early Learning Council's Preschool for All recommendations are comprehensive and based on the best research-based practices in the field of early childhood education. However, an initiative of this magnitude cannot be realized overnight.

Given the critical role that well-trained teachers play in fostering school readiness, the greatest challenge may be ensuring an adequate supply of certified preschool teachers to conduct rich learning activities that address each child's needs. The Governor and General Assembly could build Preschool for All over time, gradually adding new quality components and extending services to more children. Each new investment would add value and bring important benefits to Illinois' children and families.

With adequate funding, the Council recommends that Preschool for All be constructed over five years, building on Illinois' longstanding commitment to serve children who are at risk of school failure and their families first. Providers in all communities could apply to begin serving children and families in Year 1, allowing communities across the state to experience the benefits of Preschool for All initially. Building the program over five years would give them time to engage the public, increase capacity, coordinate linkages with local resources, and ensure buy-in from families and other community members, as well as organizations and employers.

Which components would be implemented first? The Illinois Early Learning Council considered the full range of Preschool for All components and identified top priorities. While all of the quality components were considered important, there was wide consensus that program quality rests most heavily on efforts to ensure the continued high qualifications of staff (particularly lead teachers and program administrators), improve staff preparation, and provide excellent ongoing professional development. This is underscored by research findings demonstrating that young children's learning and development clearly depend on the educational qualifications of their teachers. New investments would be necessary to assist higher education institutions to expand early childhood programs to meet the demand for more certified teachers and well-trained administrators, such as alternative certification

programs and expanded, more accessible course offerings. The Council also identified among its top priorities for initial implementation the need for consultation services by experts who assist preschool staff to promote children's social and emotional development and manage difficult behaviors in the classroom, ongoing staff training in program content and administrative areas, and program and financial quality assurance monitoring and technical assistance. A systems-level evaluation is also needed to ensure that programs are being implemented properly and to measure overall quality. Study results would guide future policy decisions, identify best practices, and assist educators to more effectively prepare children for school.

Funding

Many programs and services for young children already exist in our state, and significant funding streams already flow into them. Existing funding sources include the Early Childhood Block Grant, the Child Care Assistance Program, Head Start, Early Childhood Special Education, the United States Department of Agriculture's Child Care Food Program, parent fees, and others. Fundraising efforts also generate additional monies. Preschool for All monies should supplement, not replace, these existing funding streams.

Most Preschool for All funding would pay for direct services—establishing new programs or enhancing the quality of existing programs. Every participating program—whether new or existing—would be required to meet Preschool for All standards and would apply for the specific resources needed to do so. Providers would apply for funding based on the type, frequency, and intensity of services they provide. Providers would also receive funding to cover the costs of upgrading services in order to meet program standards (for example, by hiring bachelor's-level teachers or acquiring additional curricular materials).

Other funds would sustain infrastructure supports that are needed to improve and maintain quality across all settings. Preschool for All funding would pay for statewide program monitoring and evaluation, technical assistance for continuous quality improvement, and information technologies. High priority would be given to activities needed to prepare and retain a qualified workforce. The Illinois Early Learning Council recognizes the importance of transportation in ensuring access to programs and funding to upgrade or build new facilities. The Council will continue to work on strategies and options for addressing these critical areas.

Forging a Coordinated Early Learning System

The state and federal governments already support an array of services for Illinois children from birth to age five, financed through diverse funding streams. But these programs reach only some children. Preschool for All complements and transforms these systems in the interest of a larger good—an excellent early learning system with sufficient capacity to help every child fulfill his or her promise.

Linking and integrating programs is a key challenge. Across the state, many people and programs are hard at work, addressing the developmental and educational needs of young children and their families. But individual programs often have limited ability to address children's comprehensive needs. And different programs serving the same children and families often operate in isolation or at cross purposes. Because school readiness involves all domains of development, efforts to strengthen school readiness must work toward integration and coherence. In practice, this means working toward one early learning system, with a coherent set of quality standards for all service providers. Family, friends, and neighbors providing care in home settings who are not required to be licensed play a crucial role in many communities and need to be brought into the fold.

When It All Comes Together What Will Preschool for All Mean For...

Families with preschoolers: All families with 3- and 4-year-olds would have access to at least 12.5 hours per week of high-quality preschool. Families decide on the provider, setting and schedule that work best for them. Depending on their needs, they could choose providers who offer half-day Preschool for All programs or incorporate Preschool for All into school-day or full-workday programs. In many cases, they can choose from existing providers in their communities. Parents can be sure that any Preschool for All provider they choose would be held to high standards. They can also count on respect for parents' preferences and consistent efforts to engage families in program activities.

Families with infants and toddlers who are at risk of school failure: These families would be eligible for voluntary comprehensive child development and family support services. Families could choose among providers who offer a research-based proven program model. Whichever provider they select, services would focus on prevention and the promotion of optimal well-being. They would be family-centered, culturally competent, and relationship-based. Children with the greatest needs would receive the most intensive services.

Providers: A broad range of service providers may apply to become Preschool for All programs—whether for-profit or non-profit, school-based or community-based. Licensed family child care providers are eligible (but not license-exempt family, friends, or neighbors who care for fewer than three children). Providers would not have to meet program standards when they apply, but they would have to use Preschool for All funds to meet the standards. Applicants would need to be prepared to explain the mission, goals, and structure of their program and to show evidence of collaboration with other community programs serving young children and families.

Communities: Helping children enter kindergarten "ready for school" is a community responsibility. Preschool for All would provide opportunities for all children to learn the skills necessary for life-long learning and social success and for family members to contribute to the educational goals of their children. Through collaborative efforts, every program would establish ties with community organizations and service providers to ensure children receive the health care and other support services they need. These efforts would maximize the efficient use of resources, enhance the quality of community life, and promote civic involvement.

The State: Illinois would benefit because, over time, children would be better prepared for kindergarten; elementary and secondary schools would need fewer resources for remediation and special education; taxpayers would spend less on crime prevention, incarceration, and welfare; and employers would be able to count on better prepared workers.

Transitions between infant/toddler and preschool programs, and between preschool programs and kindergarten, need to be eased. Early learning programs must be linked to other early childhood providers, programs, and services.

Community Collaboration

Building an early learning system requires the participation of people and organizations from all walks of life. After all, school readiness involves thinking and reasoning skills—but it also involves many other dimensions of development. Children's health, social and emotional development, communication skills, and motivation to learn are all part of the equation. As a result, no single institution or agency can serve children and families or improve achievement by itself.

As the pieces of Preschool for All come together, engaging all stakeholders in a community is a key challenge. It is important to harness the energies not only of parents and early educators, but also of local government, family support and early intervention agencies, child care resource and referral organizations, higher education, health care providers, business, and other organizations.

Joint efforts can take many forms and assume many structures. Whatever shape it takes, a community collaboration might: conduct community education and outreach; help early education programs link with other service providers and stakeholders; compile and update directories of early childhood resources and services; identify gaps in services and infrastructure needs; conduct research and planning for new or expanded services; and develop new resources at the local level for early childhood priorities.

Taking Action is the Only Option

No one knows what the future will bring, but we do know who will make it happen. They are already here—in their parents' arms, in playgrounds and pediatricians' offices, in early care and education programs of all kinds. They are tomorrow's employees and leaders, artists and inventors, parents and voters. In future crises, they will be our first responders and best hope.

No one knows whether they will be ready for the challenges they will meet, but we do know that high-quality early education will make it much more likely. The research is clear: high-quality programs can have long-lasting effects on children's success. Given what we know, taking action is the only option.

This report has shown that Preschool for All is the smart thing to do. The evidence is overwhelming that early childhood education pays financial dividends by reducing future costs for special education and other forms of remediation. By making greater investments in early education, our state can increase the odds that the billions of dollars we spend on K-12 education will have the greatest, most positive impact.

It is also the right thing to do. Preschool for All is a matter of basic fairness. We expect a great deal of our children. We owe it to them—to *all* of them—to provide the opportunity for the best possible start in life.



Appendix A

Recommendations for Future Consideration

The Illinois Early Learning Council developed a set of comprehensive recommendations to enhance preschool program quality. At full implementation, the Council estimated that 190,000 children would choose to participate in high-quality preschool programs offered under Preschool for All. To support every program enhancement recommended by the Council's committees, approximately \$415 million would be required annually in addition to our current investments in the Early Childhood Block Grant, the Child Care Assistance Program, Early Childhood Special Education, and Head Start.

Although each new investment would add value and bring important benefits to Illinois' children and families, Council members identified the components they felt would make the greatest difference to children's school readiness when added to the current base of programs. The Illinois Early Learning Council's top priorities have been incorporated into Governor Blagojevich's proposed five year plan for Preschool for All. These are highlighted in the Preschool for All Summary of Recommendations. The recommendations below are presented for future consideration as additional resources become available to further enhance Illinois' preschool programs.

- Extend the length of a preschool class session from 2.5 to 3 hours
- Fund higher teacher-child ratios for children at high risk of school failure
- Provide Family Resource Coordinators to enhance family support services
- Provide a pay differential for bilingual teachers
- Fund local community collaborations to link and coordinate services for young children and their families
- Help fund Gateways to Opportunity, an early childhood professional development support system
- Mentor new teachers
- Pilot and evaluate innovative models to reach children cared for by family members, friends, and neighbors
- Increase investments in indoor and outdoor equipment

Appendix B

Illinois' Early Childhood Programs

The Early Childhood Block Grant, administered by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), supports early childhood education programs to ensure that children under five develop a strong foundation for learning.

- **STATE PREKINDERGARTEN:** In FY05, State PreK served 67,000 three- and four-year olds who because of their home and community environment are subject to such language, cultural, economic and like disadvantages that they have been determined to be at risk of academic failure. The goal of the program is to prepare children for success in school. Most classrooms are in public schools and adhere to high standards regarding the educational program and parent and community involvement. Eligibility is determined by a range of risk factors, including developmental delay, limited English proficiency, low family income, and low parental education. There is no income eligibility limit and no requirement that parents work. State PreK services are delivered by certified teachers with compensation levels generally commensurate with those of local elementary school teachers.
- **EARLY CHILDHOOD SPECIAL EDUCATION:** An additional 17,700 children ages three and four with disabilities or significant delays who have Individualized Education Plans were served by Early Childhood Special Education funded by federal, state, and local funds. These programs are free but restricted to children who are at risk or those with disabilities and most are offered for a half day only.
- **CHILD CARE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (CCAP),** administered by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), provided subsidies in FY05 to 45,600 three- and four-year-olds in working families with low incomes: 32,500 were served in child care centers, 8,800 in licensed family child care homes, and 14,300 were cared for by friends and relatives in homes that are exempt from licensing requirements. Of this total, almost 13,000 children received a child care subsidy in addition to State PreK and/or Head Start to help support full-workday, year-round education and care services. In addition, 48,500 children from six weeks up to three years of age received assistance through CCAP: 16,000 were served in child care centers, 12,000 in licensed family child care homes, and 20,500 were cared for by friends and relatives in homes that are exempt from licensing requirements. The Child Care Assistance Program was created to ensure that low-income parents

have access to affordable child care so that they can remain in the workforce. In order to qualify for assistance, a family's income must be at or below 50 percent of the State Median Income (\$34,584 for a family of four in FY05) and be engaged in an allowable activity, such as work or certain education and training activities. All parents must pay a co-payment toward the cost of care, and if a parent loses her job or gets a raise, her child may lose eligibility. State child care regulations do not require teachers with 2- or 4-year college degrees nor adherence to educational standards.

- **HEAD START** served 36,600 three- and four-year-olds and 2,700 infants and toddlers in FY05 with a proven program of family support, education, and comprehensive services such as health, mental health, dental care, and social services. The goal of this federally funded and administered program is to "break the cycle of poverty" and improve children's chances for success in school and later life. Participants' household income must be at or below the federal poverty level (currently \$18,850 for a family of four). The vast majority of Head Start programs are half day, and no fees are charged for services. All staff, including bus drivers and lunchroom aides, receive specialized training, but only 50 percent of teachers need to have associate degrees.
- **BLOCK GRANT INFANT/TODDLER SERVICES:** 11 percent of total Block Grant funds support programs that work with the parents and caregivers of infants and toddlers to promote healthy child development.
- **OTHER INFANT/TODDLER SERVICES:** Numerous other programs serving pregnant women and children from birth to age three are funded by the Illinois Department of Human Services, the Illinois Department of Public Health, and the Illinois Department of Health Care and Family Services (formerly the Illinois Department of Public Aid).

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Illinois Maternal and Child Health
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Illinois Deaf and Hard of Hearing
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Erikson Institute

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The Irving Harris Foundation

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Chicago State University

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Early Childhood Education

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Chicago Department of Children & Youth
Services

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Office of Family Health

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Chicago Metropolitan 2020

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Voices for Illinois Children

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Action for Children

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Baby TALK

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University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign

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Illinois Network of Child Care Resource &
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Circles of Learning

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Chicago Metropolis 2020

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Action for Children

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Illinois State Board of Education – Early
Childhood Education

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Rockford School District 205

Marsha Johnson
Comprehensive Mental Health Center

Sokoni Karanja
Centers for New Horizons

Laurie LeBreton
Parents United for Responsible Education

Sue Markko
U.S. Department of Health and Human
Services – Administration for Children &
Families, Region V

Harriet Meyer
Ounce of Prevention Fund

Janice Moenster
Children's Home and Aid Society of Illinois

Carolyn Newberry Schwartz
The Oak Park Collaboration for Early
Childhood Care and Education

Sureshrani Paintal
Chicago State University – Early Childhood
Education

Leticia Ramirez
El Valor

Vanessa Rich
Chicago Department of Children & Youth
Services

Bonnie Roelle
Chicago Public Schools

Edna Sanders
Chicago Public Schools

Linda Saterfield
Illinois Department of Human Services –
Bureau of Child Care & Development

Nancy Shier
Kids Public Education and Policy Project

Sara Slaughter
Chicago Metropolis 2020

Luz Maria Solis
Chicago Public Schools

Mark Valentine
Ounce of Prevention Fund

Laurie Walker
Skip-A-Long Day Care

Maureen Whalen
Germantown Hills
School District # 69

Mary Wonderlick
Chicago Public Schools
(Retired)

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