



start small
GROW GREAT

INVESTING IN HIGH QUALITY PRE-K A STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL SUCCESS

This issue brief is the culmination of two years of research by the Children's Institute. We wanted to know the most cost effective investments Oregon could make to prepare children for school and life success.

We interviewed and met with leading national thinkers and state experts, commissioned independent statewide polling, and learned important lessons from the significant advances in other states. The research is clear: investing in high quality pre-k delivers extraordinary results.

Oregon has an incredible opportunity to help close the achievement gap by building on its successful pre-k program for at-risk kids: Oregon Head Start Prekindergarten. By starting small through targeted investments with the greatest payoff, Oregon can grow great by ensuring more children start school ready to learn and ready to succeed.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There is an urgent need to invest in early childhood education for the future of Oregon and its citizens. To be economically competitive, Oregon must produce more high school and college graduates and a more highly trained and skilled workforce. To accomplish this, we must ensure all children come to school ready to succeed.

The economic and scientific research is clear. Young children are hard-wired to learn from birth. We lose a vital opportunity if we do not help them succeed during the most critical window of brain development – from 0-5. When we provide young children with a high quality pre-kindergarten experience and support their healthy development, their chances of succeeding in school and life increase tremendously.

The pay-off for Oregon's children: Children who attend high quality pre-kindergarten programs enter school ready to learn. They are more likely to graduate from high school and college and have better paying jobs. Providing high quality pre-kindergarten for economically disadvantaged children is the most cost effective strategy for closing the achievement gap.

The pay-off for Oregon's economy: Money invested in early intervention significantly cuts later expenditures for social services, remedial and special education, criminal justice, unemployment and more. Investing in early education is a powerful economic development strategy that yields big dividends for society that Oregon cannot afford to overlook.

All children benefit from high quality pre-kindergarten. However, we know that disadvantaged children reap the greatest benefits. High quality pre-kindergarten programs that target the neediest children with intensive social services deliver the most significant results.

"It is time to ensure all eligible kids have the chance to attend Oregon Head Start Prekindergarten."

***-Richard C. Alexander,
Chair, Ready for School
Founder, Viking Industries***





“If you want to get in on the ground floor of a great investment, EARLY CHILDHOOD is it. Have you ever wished you’d been in on the Google IPO? This is even better.”

–Isaac Regenstreif, Executive Director, PacifiCorp Foundation for Learning

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY *continued*

Expand Oregon’s Proven Pre-K Program to Reach All Eligible Children

Oregon’s Head Start Prekindergarten Program (OPK) serves 3- and 4-year-olds growing up in poverty. It is a high quality, comprehensive early childhood education program with the overall goal of increasing school readiness. OPK provides:

- * Pre-kindergarten education
- * Access to health, mental health, dental and nutrition services
- * Parent education
- * Family support including home visits

Oregon Head Start Prekindergarten narrows the achievement gap and helps children most likely to start behind begin on a more level playing field. Yet, it currently serves just 60% of the eligible children and there are long waiting lists due to limited funding.

Expanding OPK is the first of many steps needed to ensure that all children, regardless of their background, arrive at school ready to learn. Oregon’s long standing promise to fully fund the OPK program provides an opportunity to direct our limited resources where they can have the greatest payoff.

“The most promising strategy [for closing the achievement gap] is to increase access to high quality center-based early childhood education programs for all low-income three and four year-olds.”

***–The Future of Children, 2005,
A Collaboration of
Princeton University and the Brookings Institution***



Sara wants to go to Head Start like her big brother Jamal. But she is on the waiting list.

INVESTMENTS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION YIELD BIG RETURNS

Brain Research:

- * 90% of brain development happens by age six.¹
- * Positive relationships with adults are critical to the healthy cognitive, social and emotional development of young children.
- * Our major public investment in children begins after this critical window of brain development.²

Economic Research:

The gold-standard study on the economic impact of high quality pre-kindergarten for at-risk children found that for every \$1 invested there was a nearly \$13 return to the public.

- * If the benefits to the participants are included, the return is closer to \$17 for every dollar invested.³
- * According to Minneapolis Federal Reserve Bank economists, early childhood education has the highest return of any publicly funded economic development strategy.⁴

"A preschooler has twice as many brain synapses as her pediatrician."

*—Helen J. Neville, Director,
Brain Development Lab,
University of Oregon*

Education Research:

- * Children who attend high quality pre-kindergarten start school as better readers.⁵
- * Children who are behind in reading in the first grade only have a 1 in 8 chance of ever catching up.⁶
- * Kids who are poor readers in third grade are unlikely to graduate from high school.⁷

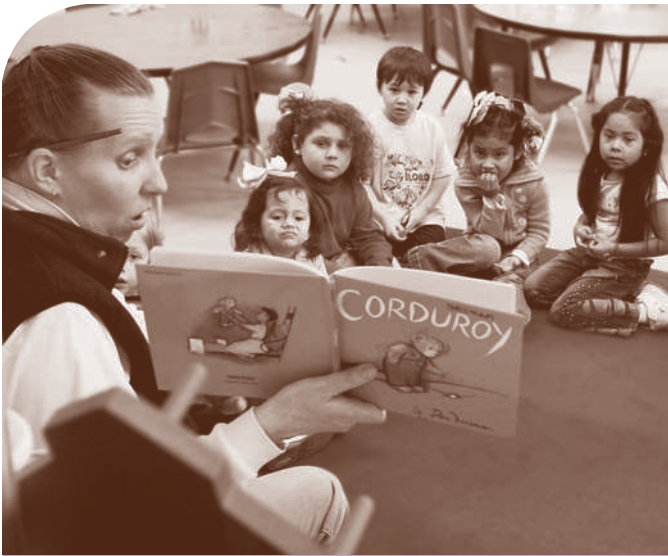
Policy Implications:

- * At-risk children who complete high quality pre-kindergarten are less likely to be held back or require special education classes.⁸
- * They are more likely to graduate from high school and less likely to commit a crime.⁹
- * They have better paying jobs and pay more taxes.¹⁰

"Investing in early education has the highest payback. The biggest bang for the buck is at the front end. You have to go to where kids get their basic skills, where their brain development occurs, and where they build their foundations for later learning."

—Ken Thrasher, Chairman/CEO, Compli





At the state level, 14 states increased their pre-kindergarten funding by a total of \$300 million in 2004.

In 2005 there were increases in 26 states, totalling \$600 million.

Oregon's funding has been virtually flat – not enough to make Oregon Head Start Prekindergarten available to all children who qualify.¹¹

OREGON TRAILS OTHER STATES IN EDUCATING ITS YOUNG CHILDREN

*Oregon ranks 40th out of 50 states in the percentage of all three and four year-olds who are enrolled in pre-kindergarten – public or private – with only 41% enrolled.*¹² Oregon's program for disadvantaged kids, OPK, reaches too few of the more than 16,000 three and four year-olds living in poverty. Close to 40% – about 6,400 kids – are not able to enroll because of the lack of funding. Most OPK providers across the state have a waiting list of kids who want to get into the program.

Making Good on a Promise

Oregon was once a leader in expanding access to high quality pre-kindergarten. In 1988, the Oregon Legislature invested state dollars to expand access to the federally funded Head Start program through Oregon Prekindergarten (OPK) and set the goal of reaching all children living in poverty. Many states have now surpassed Oregon in making high quality pre-kindergarten available to their children. By fully funding OPK, Oregon can achieve the goal it set for itself fifteen years ago and fulfill its promise that more children come to school prepared to succeed.¹³



"I have no doubt that if OPK were able to serve all eligible students, we would see significant academic improvement."

*–Steve Swisher, Superintendent
Crook County School District*

TOO MANY OREGON KIDS START BEHIND

Every other year, Oregon surveys its kindergarten teachers to find out if children are arriving to school prepared. The survey looks at six areas of school readiness:¹⁴

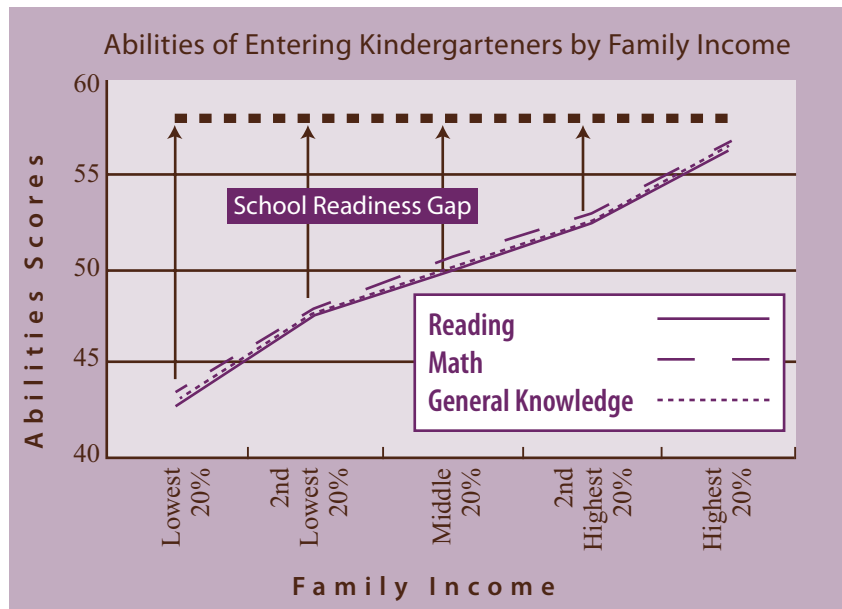
- * Cognition/general knowledge
- * Social/emotional development
- * Motor development
- * Physical well being
- * Language use
- * Approach to learning

1 in 5 kids is not ready for kindergarten

When kindergarten teachers were asked what they expected from children on the first day of school, 75% agreed a child should be:¹⁵

- * Physically healthy, rested and nourished
- * Able to communicate thoughts and needs in words
- * Curious and enthusiastic about new activities

Not Just Children from Low Income Families Start Behind



The State of Preschool; 2004 Preschool Yearbook, NIEER

“Pre-kindergarten gives kids a big advantage. They do a lot better in school. When kids succeed academically, they don’t get frustrated. We’re less likely to see them sitting out in the hall or in the principal’s office for acting out.”

***-Kendall Palmer, Kindergarten Teacher
Riverside Elementary, Milwaukie Oregon***

Quality Counts:
Only high quality programs like OPK deliver results.



Strong parental support and involvement¹⁶



Consistent and nurturing adult relationships¹⁷



Well educated and trained teachers¹⁸



Small class sizes¹⁹



Curriculum that matches the child’s development²⁰



Comprehensive approach addressing cognitive, physical, social and emotional development²¹



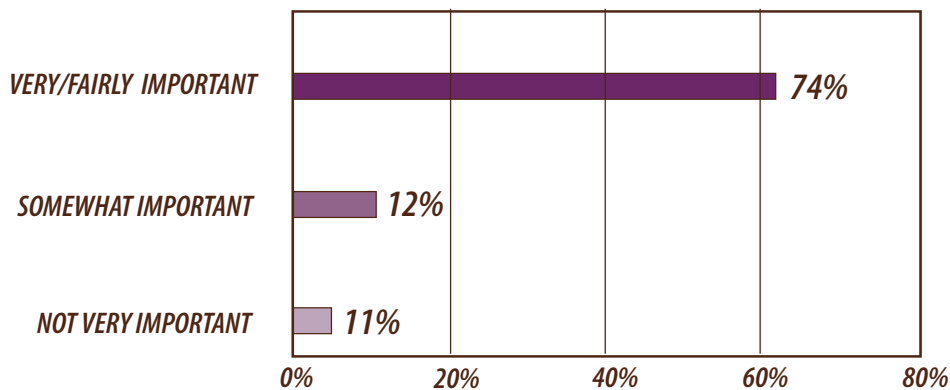
“It is becoming clear that what happens in the first five years of a child’s life can greatly enhance or diminish the benefit of that child’s next 16 years of education.”

*–Dr. Philip G. Long, Superintendent
Medford School District*

OREGONIANS SUPPORT HIGH QUALITY PRE-K PROGRAMS LIKE OPK

Oregonians understand the value of investing in high quality pre-kindergarten. In a recent poll, 74% of those interviewed said high-quality pre-k is very or fairly important for low-income children.

Q: How important do you think it is for low-income three and four-year-old children in Oregon to attend this voluntary type of pre-k program - very important, fairly important, somewhat important, or not very important?



Davis, Hibbitts & Midghall, Inc., May 2006

American business leaders overwhelmingly favor publicly-supported pre-kindergarten programs. Four out of five agreed that investments in effective preschool programs are important for the success of the U.S. economy.²²

–December 2005 poll by Zogby International

“Kids learning their ABC’s first in Head Start will prevent them from committing their first Assaults, Burglaries and Carjackings. It’s just common sense to invest now in Head Start, which will cut crime and save Oregon lives later.”

*–Chief Jerry Smith, Springfield Police Department,
February 16, 2006 at the Fight Crime: Invest In Kids Head Start Press Conference
at the Whiteaker Head Start Center, Eugene, OR.*



ALIGN DOLLARS WITH RESEARCH: EXPAND OPK

Expanding OPK allows us to:

- * Focus on disadvantaged kids who gain the most from high quality pre-kindergarten.
- * Increase access to a program that addresses all dimensions of early development – cognitive, physical, social and emotional.
- * Build on a program that is locally run, delivering results in all 36 of Oregon’s counties.
- * Support a program in which parents are actively involved in their children’s learning.
- * Fully implement a program proven to help close the achievement gap.



OPK Delivers Results

Children in OPK make tremendous gains in just one school year. Researchers tracked 570 kids from across the state:²³

AREAS OF LEARNING	% PROFICIENT – FALL 2003	% PROFICIENT – SPRING 2004
Language and Literacy	12%	62%
Early Math	8%	25%
Social and Emotional	37%	83%



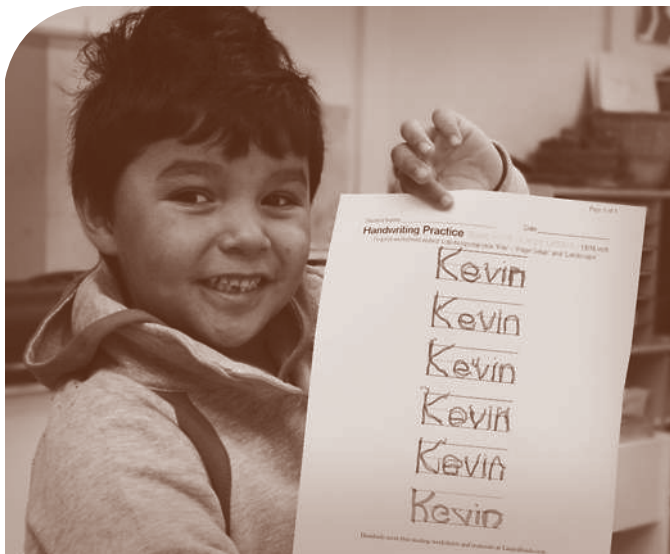
Mathematician in the Making

“William was climbing the furniture the first day he was here,” says Jean O’Shea, Oregon Head Start Prekindergarten teacher for 4 1/2 year-old William. “He’s made tremendous strides since starting last fall. Now he knows how to act in a classroom. He can sit for long periods and do very complex puzzles.”

William’s mom Jennifer is amazed at William’s progress. She said he was “very hyper” when he started school and she was worried he would need medication. But she says he is a whole new kid now at home and school. “I don’t want to feel like I failed my kids,” says 25-year-old Jennifer. “That’s why I put William in Head Start.”

William is the second of four kids. His older brother Alex did not have the opportunity to go to Head Start and he’s struggling with kindergarten now. “Alex has to have a tutor because he’s way behind. William’s now almost at the same place where Alex is.”

Jennifer’s parents are putting away a little money each month for his tuition. “I think he has the makings of a mathematician,” says Jean. But William has his own game plan, “I’m going to drive a big fire truck.”



“Pre-kindergarten should be at the center of Oregon’s economic development strategy.”

-Superintendent of Public Instruction Susan Castillo speaking to the Senate Education and Workforce Committee in February 2005

MOVING RESEARCH TO ACTION

Making sure that all eligible kids can enroll in OPK is a strong next step towards making sure all Oregon children arrive at the kindergarten door ready to succeed. But it is just a start. There is much more to be done. Supporting parents as their children’s first teacher and ensuring funds for proven programs for children 0-3 are also critical building blocks for school success. By making strategic and targeted investments in programs serving children birth to five, Oregon can build a system of early learning for Oregon’s youngest children. ***There is no more important investment we can make as a state than to ensure every child starts life healthy and ready to succeed.***

Children’s Institute’s Policy Recommendations:

- 1) Fully fund Oregon Head Start Prekindergarten (OPK) for disadvantaged 3- and 4-year-olds, while supporting continuous quality improvements.***
- 2) Provide “set aside” funds for proven early childhood programs for at-risk children 0-3.***

Ready for School



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Join the Ready for School Campaign

Several of Oregon’s top business, philanthropic and civic leaders have joined together in the ***Ready for School*** public awareness campaign to address the future of Oregon’s workforce and the urgent need to adequately prepare children for school and life. Partners include the Children’s Institute, Innovation Partners and Stand for Children.

The campaign’s goal is to make sure all children have access to high quality pre-kindergarten, starting with those most in need. ***Ready for School*** is raising public awareness about this critical issue and working to persuade the 2007 State Legislature to fully fund Oregon Head Start Prekindergarten.

Learn more at www.ready-for-school.org

TRAILBLAZING STATES

Several states are successfully aligning public and private resources to invest in early education. The types of programs and how they are funded vary greatly, but there is one common factor: Each state has succeeded in large part because of strong leadership – from elected officials, researchers, scientists, philanthropists and business.



WASHINGTON

“The business community believes the single biggest investment in our economy is in education. They believe in early childhood education. So philanthropic organizations like Gates (Foundation) and businesses like Boeing are going to put millions of dollars on the table to ensure that every child gets a quality early childhood education. The business community is now saying, along with me, that it is the single best investment in our economy.”

–*Washington Governor Christine Gregoire*, February 12, 2006 *Oregonian* article. Under Gregoire’s leadership, Washington created a Department of Early Learning and Thrive by Five, a public-private partnership to expand early childhood services.

“We have made early childhood education a priority and we have put our money where our mouth is. We’ve expanded funding for pre-school by 50%, given 25,000 more three and four year-olds a chance to start school early, and Illinois is now ranked among the top three states in the nation for early childhood education.”

–*Illinois Governor Rod R. Blagojevich*, in his 2006 State of the State Address. Despite a budget deficit, Governor Blagojevich kept his promise to increase funding for the state’s Early Childhood Block Grant by \$30 million – most of which is for Illinois’s high quality pre-kindergarten program. And 11% is dedicated to funding services for infants and toddlers.



ILLINOIS



ARKANSAS

“By fixing education and starting kids early, we can solve so many other problems. It’s a matter of economics for us as a business. While it’s certainly the right thing to do, it’s also an opportunity to improve the economic environment where we operate and to reduce the burden on our customers.”

–*Hugh McDonald, president and CEO of Arkansas-based Entergy*. Entergy conducted an economic impact study that found the per-child cost of two years of pre-k would return \$4.50 to the state for every \$1 invested. McDonald led the Arkansas business community in partnering with advocacy groups to create a critical mass of support. This resulted in state funding for 7,000 children per year to attend high quality pre-kindergarten.

“We think quality is the big selling point. Once parents see a quality effort they clamor for it and districts add it. Parents are our best advocates.”

–*Dr. Ramona Paul, Oklahoma Assistant State Superintendent*. Oklahoma proves that quality and access can go hand in hand. Oklahoma offers a voluntary pre-kindergarten program to all four year-olds. Close to 70% of the states 4 year-olds are enrolled in this program, more than in any other state. The program is also high quality, with small classes sizes and highly trained teachers.



OKLAHOMA

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Our sincere thanks to Neighborhood House's Oregon Head Start Prekindergarten programs for allowing us to take the photos that appear in this brief.



“When we invest in early education, we create a brighter future for Oregon’s youngest citizens and our state’s economy and quality of life. That’s why I support providing access to high quality early education for Oregon’s children, starting with those most in need.”

-Oregon Governor Ted Kulongoski

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Founded in 2003 by business and philanthropic leaders, the Children’s Institute is an independent research and action organization, marshalling resources and smart thinking to ignite action for Oregon’s at-risk children.