

2005

Pre-K and
Politics 2005

PreK NOW

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2005

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2005 was a banner year for high-quality pre-k. Across the nation, states made substantial new commitments, grew existing programs, and provided support for professional development and other quality-building efforts. Of course, not all the news was good. In some states, governors failed to advance programs that benefit children, while in others, inadequate governance left programs rudderless. This report takes a closer look at the year's pre-k winners and losers and identifies those states where pre-k is at a crossroads.

With *Pre-K and Politics 2005*, Pre-K Now shares strategies for success that we hope will spur advocates, parents, and policymakers to action in the new year. Success in 2006 will require redoubled commitments; bold, creative strategies; and an unwavering focus on young children and our national future.

About the Political Barometer

The Pre-K Now Political Barometer¹ serves as the framework for this review of the year in pre-k. Pre-K Now has identified ten essential conditions that create a favorable political climate for developing and/or expanding high-quality pre-k for all three and four year olds. The criteria are based on a review of available research, and Pre-K Now applies them on a state-by-state basis to gauge the atmosphere surrounding pre-k. We use these measures to evaluate public and policymaker opinions and to rate the strengths and weaknesses of efforts to promote and attain high-quality pre-k for all. Together with the quality and access benchmarks tracked by the National Institute for Early Education Research,² the Political Barometer provides a comprehensive assessment of the pre-k climate in each state.

High-quality pre-k happens when leaders, both inside and outside government, collaborate with local, state, and national experts, parents,

and the public to build a strong system. For each criterion, our barometer identifies several strategies, activities, or approaches used by leading states to ensure that all children start school prepared to succeed.

There is no one-size-fits-all policy approach to promoting pre-k, and states can and should pursue various options based on their needs, resources, and priorities. Even in a lean fiscal environment, state leaders and advocates have an opportunity to build collaborative relationships, develop infrastructure, and leverage existing resources to develop policy momentum and build grassroots support for the long term.

The Political Barometer is not only a measure of states' commitments to early childhood education but also an instrument of real progress for pre-k.

1

Gubernatorial Support

Every governor has the power to set agenda priorities and stimulate public debate about important issues. Their unique position affords governors exclusive venues not open to other state leaders. State of the State Addresses command attention from lawmakers, the public, and the media and provide an opportunity to set policy, propose and defend programs, and initiate discussion. Through their role in the budget process, governors are further able to establish and promote an agenda. Together, these powers provide unmatched influence over media coverage and public discussion about major policy priorities. Strong gubernatorial leadership can be the single most important element in securing high-quality pre-k for the children of any state.

Maria Whelan
President & CEO
Action for Children

Leadership requires a rare blend of patience, persistence, passion, and persuasion. In Illinois, our governor is a real leader on pre-k, and thousands of children's lives will be better for it.



Illinois

All governors must choose between countless issues and identify those requiring immediate action. Many governors have recognized pre-k as an urgent need, but few have made a greater commitment to children than Governor Rod Blagojevich of Illinois. In 2005, Governor Blagojevich earned passage of the third annual \$30 million early childhood education funding increase, the realization of his 2002 campaign promise.

Despite tough fiscal times, Governor Blagojevich held to his commitments and made the case for pre-k. So in 2005, he not only fulfilled his promise but did so with strong, bipartisan, legislative support. With pre-k now available to 25,000 more children and 11 percent of the new dollars earmarked for infants and toddlers,³ In February 2006, Governor Blagojevich firmly established his pre-k agenda as the nation's boldest when he announced his intention to provide pre-k to every Illinois three and four year old. The Illinois Early Learning Council will focus its 2006 efforts on implementation issues, including creating a robust monitoring and accountability system to ensure quality.



Indiana

Indiana is one of only nine states that provide no state funding for pre-k or *Head Start*, and Governor Mitch Daniels has not yet addressed this serious neglect. Prior to his election in November 2004, Indiana was working to establish a pre-k program, but when Daniels took office, that progress came to a standstill.

In 1999, Governor Frank O'Bannon formed the Education Roundtable, charged with developing a plan to phase in full-day kindergarten and implement a pre-k program. Lt. Gov. Joe Kernan assumed the governorship upon O'Bannon's death in 2003 and accelerated the creation of early learning services until he left office at the end of 2004.

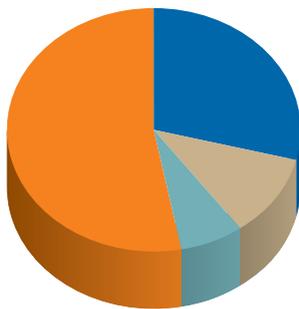
Today, the opportunity remains to build on earlier efforts and create a high-quality pre-k program in Indiana. State legislators, local superintendents, and state Department of Education officials continue to support pre-k without the governor's backing. Should Governor Daniels choose to support pre-k, children in his state could be well served in short order.

2

Key Policymaker Support

Even in states where the governor champions pre-k, other policymakers must support the effort. When the governor is not a pre-k advocate, public debate and legislative success depend upon bold, outspoken leadership from other prominent state policymakers, elected or appointed. In a number of states these champions, frequently the chief state school officer, state director of early childhood education, or dedicated state legislator, work to inform lawmakers about the research on pre-k and about building a strong foundation through early learning. For these policymakers, success depends upon party affiliation, tenure, record of legislative accomplishments, ability to secure gubernatorial and legislative support, expertise in early education, availability of funding, and, most importantly, personal commitment.

Would you be more or less likely to support a candidate who favors pre-k? More than half of voters surveyed say "more likely."



- More likely to support **53%**
- Makes no difference **29%**
- Less likely to support **11%**
- Not sure / depends **7%**

Source: Hart Research Associates, October 2005 Survey



Louisiana

Even before Hurricanes Katrina and Rita struck, Louisiana was building a better future for its children. Those efforts, including a \$20 million increase in 2005 for the high-quality LA4 pre-k program,⁴ will help strengthen Louisiana's recovery.

For over two decades, Louisiana pre-k was the mission of one leader: State Superintendent of Schools Cecil Picard. Throughout his career, Superintendent Picard educated policymakers about how pre-k changes outcomes for children, and he gained enthusiastic support from many legislators. In the storms' aftermath, Superintendent Picard knows that by getting displaced children back on the educational track, pre-k can help mitigate the disaster's long-term impact.

At the December 2005 state board of education meeting, Superintendent Picard noted, "LA4 works; it's an investment for our future and it should be offered to every child...." Though work remains, the Bring Back New Orleans Commission's recommendation to launch a pre-k-for-all program for three to five year olds is a testament to Superintendent Picard's dedication to this issue.



Kentucky

In 1990, Kentucky initiated an ambitious program of educational reform, including development of a state-funded pre-k system. Today, the *Kentucky Preschool Program* is of average quality and serves only 28 percent of the state's four year olds.⁵ Kentucky has slowly abandoned its commitment to high-quality pre-k. In 2004, funding was cut by nearly \$5 million. In 2005, that funding was restored,⁶ but no new money or legislation was proposed.

Child advocacy groups continue to press for expansion and development of Kentucky's pre-k system. However, through 2005, Governor Ernie Fletcher had not supported those efforts, and no state legislator had stepped in to fill the leadership vacuum.

In a positive sign for 2006, Governor Fletcher proposed an additional \$23.5 million for pre-k.⁷ Legislative leaders including the Speaker of the House have recommended another \$3.5 million.⁸ Pre-K Now hopes this is the beginning of strong leadership on high-quality pre-k for all Kentucky children.

3

Funding

All states, in order to provide pre-k to all three and four year olds and offer services of the highest quality, require substantial funding. Nationally, per-child pre-k investment is well below that of K-12. When pre-k funding is flat or declining, states cannot improve quality or expand access to all children. On the other hand, programs receiving annual increases that exceed the rate of inflation generally demonstrate improvement in both quality and availability. However, increases must not come at the expense of other children's services. Such cuts undermine the very systems upon which pre-k is built, reduce basic services that support children's success, compromise funding efforts, and diminish program quality.

Carolyn Cobb

Executive Director
Office of School Readiness

The 30 percent funding increase for *More at Four* will provide high-quality pre-k services to more than 3,200 additional children. Our leaders understand that increased pre-k funding finances North Carolina's future.



North Carolina

Though long a leader in early childhood services with its renowned *Smart Start* program, North Carolina came late to pre-k, providing no state-funded program as late as 2001. That year, state lawmakers, led by Governor Mike Easley, recognized the need and the potential and united across party lines to make a solid commitment to pre-k, establishing the high-quality *More at Four* program.

In 2005, North Carolina reaffirmed that commitment, increasing its *More at Four* investment to \$66.6 million.⁹ In part, these funds will support the state's new Office of School Readiness, established to provide oversight and improve delivery for *More at Four* and federally funded public school pre-k programs, develop the teacher corps, and support high-quality standards in diverse pre-k settings.

North Carolina is thriving. With a booming economy, wise political leadership, and strong commitments to programs like high-quality pre-k – particularly to expanding access – North Carolina is working to support families and build prosperity into the future.



New Hampshire

State funding for pre-k is not available in New Hampshire, and a lack of leadership is to blame. The Granite State is well known for its politically independent population to whom new expenditures are often a hard sell.

Resistance to increased taxes and new spending has prevented state leaders from embracing pre-k and making the case to voters. Instead, in 2005, the New Hampshire legislature appropriated only a 5 percent increase for childcare, but the same services sustained a 36 percent cut in 2004.¹⁰ However, even when childcare funding is stable, it is not a substitute for high-quality, state-funded pre-k for all. The significant benefits that pre-k would generate for children and the state should be compelling more lawmaker action.

Of course, the New Hampshire legislature's reluctance to spend frivolously is responsible, but the failure to invest wisely in pre-k is myopic and is shortchanging New Hampshire's youngest citizens.

4

Advocacy



Phil Bredesen
Governor of Tennessee

The Tennessee Alliance for Early Education united disparate advocates under a single banner. Their collaborative, flexible, inclusive strategy was instrumental in building the broad-based public and bipartisan political support necessary for success.

Children are a political constituency without a voice and, as such, need resourceful, determined advocates to protect their interests and secure the services they need. Effective activists create grassroots efforts and compel government action. Successful advocacy requires a sophisticated, focused, and creative strategy that combines public relations, electronic technologies, and old-fashioned pavement pounding. Developing relationships with lawmakers in both parties and demonstrating a record of legislative success give advocates credibility, access, and, ultimately, results. The most influential pre-k promoters educate the public, the media, and policymakers about the urgent need for high-quality, pre-k and build broad-based, bipartisan support.



Tennessee

2005 saw tremendous gains for Tennessee's children, including a 250 percent funding increase for *Voluntary Pre-K for Tennessee*. In support of a gubernatorial initiative, the work of a creative, ambitious advocacy community ensured legislative backing for the increase and helped make pre-k a priority for both parties and the public. Using a collaborative model and employing professional marketing practices, the Tennessee Association for the Education of Young Children and Tennessee Stand for Children came together to form the Tennessee Alliance for Early Education.

The Alliance unified the strategies, resources, and influence of its diverse membership – more than 100 organizations statewide. They created momentum by educating lawmakers and voters and working with public relations experts to hone their message and engage the media. Through an inclusive approach to stakeholder outreach and a clear focus on children, the Alliance built bipartisan support for pre-k and made substantial progress on school reform.



Alabama

Across the South, pre-k is improving prospects for children in some of the nation's poorest states. In May 2000, Alabama advocates worked together to inform lawmakers about the benefits of early education. Those efforts produced legislation establishing the *School Readiness Program* and the Office of School Readiness.

However, those initial gains have not blossomed into high-quality pre-k for all Alabama children. In 2005, the legislature appropriated an additional \$1 million to expand access, but the program still serves less than 2 percent of its four year olds.¹¹ Further, no pre-k legislation was introduced in the house or senate in 2005.

One factor was a loss of focus within the state's advocacy community following the early victories, but it's not too late to reignite Alabama pre-k. The infrastructure is in place, and though extremely limited in availability, the program is of high quality.¹² An innovative advocacy effort in 2006 could make the difference for generations of Alabamans to come.

5

Business and Community Leadership

Pre-k advocates need powerful allies who can gain the attention of policy-makers and the media. America's business and community leaders have the influence to generate action on pre-k. Business leaders have long been active in the school reform movement and are now advancing pre-k as an important part of that effort. They know pre-k fosters economic development by cultivating an educated workforce, raising income and consumer-spending levels, and making our country more competitive in the international marketplace. Community leaders such as doctors, law enforcement officers, and members of the clergy identify pre-k as a powerful tool to combat poverty and start children on the path to successful, productive citizenship.

Rich Huddleston
Executive Director
Arkansas Advocates for
Children and Families

Business is the engine that powers our economy, in Arkansas and nationwide. So, when business leaders speak, policymakers listen. Business community support can make the difference for any policy initiative.



Arkansas

Arkansas's engaged business community has significantly impacted the lives of young children. The state's Chamber of Commerce and its member businesses – most notably Entergy Arkansas whose 2000 economic-impact report was instrumental in building early support for pre-k among political leaders – are a force that has earned the respect of advocates nationwide. The chamber has provided consistent leadership as well as financial and human resources to the pre-k effort, playing a key role in the establishment of the *Arkansas Better Chance (ABC)* program, the nation's highest quality state-funded pre-k program.

In 2005, the chamber, in collaboration with advocates, again backed pre-k, winning \$60 million in new investments over two years. As the state works to expand access to *ABC*, Entergy Arkansas and other business leaders have supplied public relations expertise to inform families and communities about the benefits of pre-k and about increased availability statewide. These efforts produced substantially increased enrollment, particularly in newly served districts.



New York

In 2005, the nation's most influential business community, including more *Fortune 500* companies than any other state,¹³ let another year pass without state-level action to promote new funding, even as business leaders around the country strongly supported pre-k.

With everything to gain from pre-k, the New York business community's scant support is puzzling. The benefits of high-quality pre-k include a better-educated workforce, reduced crime, and a larger tax base, outcomes that have galvanized business leaders elsewhere.

The state's board of regents called for pre-k for all and New York City made additional investments without a strong push from business leaders. A 2006 Committee for Economic Development / Pew Charitable Trusts / PNC Financial Services Group conference on economic arguments for pre-k was held in New York, which may be a sign that 2006 will be the year that business puts its power to work for New York's children.



Public Good: Civic Leaders and Pre-K

Advocates reap big rewards from building strategic alliances. Community leaders such as doctors, law enforcement officials, senior citizens' groups, and religious organizations can be invaluable partners in the pre-k movement.

- Nationwide, Fight Crime, Invest in Kids has promoted the message that high-quality pre-k helps prevent crime. In California, officials like Los Angeles County Sheriff Lee Baca, Sacramento Police Chief Albert Najera, and Fresno Police Chief Jerry Dyer have actively supported the Preschool for All initiative.

- Doctors wield tremendous influence over health policy. In New York, Docs for Tots has championed prenatal-to-five healthcare, nutritional programs, and pre-k and encouraged physicians to discuss the benefits of early education with parents.

- Florida's seniors, with recent leadership by Generations United, have supported pre-k for all, backing efforts to improve quality and secure funding. Their work has augmented that of child advocates and put a multi-generational face on the pre-k issue.

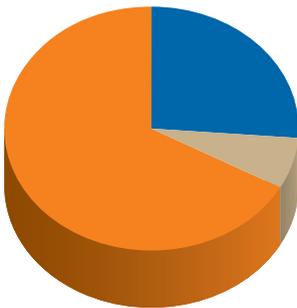
- Religious organizations provide outreach and information as well as actual pre-k services. In New Mexico, the Catholic Conference educated lawmakers about the benefits of pre-k. The Tennessee Alliance for Early Education includes many faith-based providers, such as the Martha O'Bryan Center and Calvary Place.

6

Ballot Measures & Legislation

Legislation and ballot measures are the key vehicles for enacting, funding, implementing, expanding, and improving pre-k programs. They provide occasion for citizens and stakeholders to be heard through committee hearings, letters to media outlets and legislators, and votes on election day. Debate over legislation and ballot measures garners substantial media attention. Legislation, particularly when introduced by influential policymakers, can generate momentum and support within government. In states that permit them, ballot measures are critical tools for advocates to bypass legislatures that don't prioritize pre-k or support increased funding. Together, legislation and ballot initiatives foster thorough debate and substantive action around pre-k.

Should state and local government fund voluntary pre-k for all? Two-thirds of voters say yes.



- Yes **67%**
- No **26%**
- Not sure **7%**

Source: Hart Research Associates, October 2005 Survey



Nebraska

In 2005, Nebraska passed one of the year's most comprehensive and successful pre-k bills. The legislation, sponsored by State Senator Ron Raikes, chair of the Committee on Education, and co-sponsored by several other senators, proposed funding Nebraska's pre-k system through the state's school funding formula. Pre-k will transition into the formula gradually, with monies available first to proven, high-quality programs and for at-risk children. This arrangement preserves the availability of grant funds for newer programs working to improve quality and lays the foundation for Nebraska to eventually expand pre-k access to every four year old.

The debate was strident and produced important compromise. With implementation deferred to the next budget cycle, the bill passed unanimously. In conjunction with the legislation, in order to also provide immediate support for pre-k, lawmakers increased appropriations for the state's Early Childhood Grant Program by 75 percent,¹⁴ ensuring both the present and future of pre-k for Nebraska's children.



Wyoming

In 2003, 2004, and 2005, bills to establish pre-k or to support other early learning services were introduced in the Wyoming legislature, but each died in committee. The 2005 bill, Wyoming Children's Trust Fund, proposed, "...providing for high quality early childhood care and education services...."¹⁵ This consistent refusal of the "Equality State's" legislature to support pre-k, even with budget surpluses, seemed to augur a grim future for early education in Wyoming.

In October 2005, however, Governor Dave Freudenthal's office issued a report recommending a "high quality early childhood development system."¹⁶ In response, a 2006 bill was introduced, which, "would rate child care facilities on quality, give incentive payments for higher quality care and offer scholarships for child care workers' education."¹⁷ This bill won unanimous passage out of committee and is slated for the upcoming legislative session.

Wyoming's leaders must build on these efforts and act without delay to implement a high-quality pre-k program.

7

Media



Significant print, television, radio, and electronic media coverage are indicators of the attention an issue receives from policymakers and advocacy groups and fosters public awareness, knowledge, and support. Media attention, both paid and earned, signals to legislators and the public that the topic is ripe for discussion and action. Coverage of pre-k can drive the debate, generate strong grassroots support, and create public discussion. Public service announcements, op-eds, and profiles of children in need of pre-k, together with reporting on program effectiveness, advocacy efforts, and pending legislation can educate voters and legislators and spur stakeholders to act with urgency.

David Lawrence, Jr.

President, The Early Childhood Initiative Foundation in Miami and Former Publisher, *The Miami Herald*

Journalism has a huge role here. This republic's future is based on voters being informed, and journalism is perhaps the greatest source of objective information.



Florida

In 2005, Florida implemented its new pre-k-for-all program. Advocates had actively supported the 2002 ballot measure, but in such a vast, populous state, reaching voters posed a significant challenge. According to advocates, Florida's media played a decisive role in the initiative's success. Reporters throughout Florida provided significant coverage of such matters as fiscal impacts and quality, which led to strong editorial-page support for passage of the initiative.

As the program's 2005 launch neared, the media again proved pivotal. In Florida's seven major cities, most newspapers featured over ten stories on pre-k, and of the state's 65 mid-to-large-circulation newspapers, inclusive of regional editions, 49 regularly covered pre-k and more than 28 focused on quality.¹⁸

Significant hurdles persist for Florida pre-k: funding, teacher development, accountability, and quality standards are all as yet inadequate. However, with a media committed to responsible, informed reporting, Florida's children may eventually enjoy high-quality services.



National

Among 2005's biggest disappointments was the national media's lack of interest in pre-k. Local- and state-level media organizations recognize pre-k as vital to their audiences and have covered their states' efforts in depth. The national story, however, is a broader one that only a few major outlets are positioned to cover. Unfortunately, a 2005 study noted, "a general feeling [among reporters] that, although important, pre-k...is not very newsworthy."¹⁹

In 2005, a record number of states committed to pre-k, displaying bipartisanship and fiscal responsibility, both rare in today's political climate. Still, agenda-setting institutions like the *New York Times*, CNN, and *Newsweek* provided only limited coverage.

With the notable exception of *USAToday*, the major media missed the opportunity to frame a national movement that is not only a keystone of education reform and strategic investing but also a blueprint for effective politics. Pre-k is an important story, worthy of thorough coverage in the national press.

8

Teacher Professional Development

Studies show that children do better when their teachers are well educated and fairly compensated. Yet, many pre-k teachers do not have bachelor's degrees or specialized early childhood training and many of the field's teachers are approaching retirement. States must establish educational standards for pre-k teachers that conform to existing K-12-teacher requirements and then offer support for initial and continuing education, including tuition assistance, flexible scheduling, childcare, and mentoring. Professional development strategies should be paired with aggressive recruitment that taps diverse communities and attracts bilingual teachers. Colleges and universities should be engaged as partners to ensure that degree programs reflect state requirements and are transferable.

Baji Rankin

Executive Director
New Mexico Association for the
Education of Young Children

Early education programs need teachers with degrees and specialized training in early childhood. Supporting teachers' education and paying salaries commensurate with K-12 are essential to providing high-quality early education.



New Mexico

In 2005, Governor Bill Richardson and Lt. Governor Diane Denish led an effort to establish a new pre-k program in New Mexico, requesting \$9 million from the legislature. Although the final appropriation was reduced to \$5 million for a pilot program, legislators and the governor did agree that a quality program requires highly qualified teachers. In order to provide the needed professional development, the final bill set aside 20 percent of allocated funds for professional development and higher education scholarships.

Only a few states guarantee funds for teacher development; so this provision positions the *New Mexico PreK Program* to become a quality leader. To realize this promise, New Mexico's legislature must demonstrate that their commitment is genuine: that teachers will not pursue early childhood training in vain and that New Mexico will support high-quality pre-k into the future. This will require greater and more secure pre-k appropriations in 2006 and beyond.



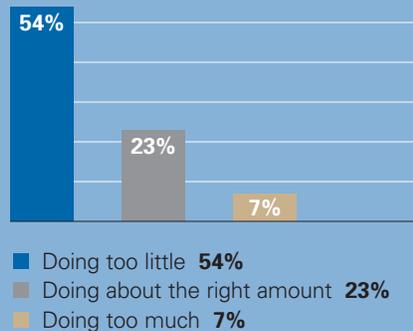
Alaska

In Alaska, state-funded pre-k services are provided to three and four year olds through *Head Start*. However, fewer than 15 percent of *Head Start* teachers hold a bachelor's degree,²⁰ and the state has not taken adequate steps to grow their numbers or to mandate their qualifications.

One recent study illustrates the risks of such inaction. The researchers note, "...the quality of [pre-k] hinges on teacher experience and qualifications," and the "...most educated age cohort in the [early childhood education] industry today is in its late 50s."²¹ In Alaska, without substantial recruitment, the impact of retirements could devastate the pre-k system.

In 2005, Alaska's First Lady established a task force to develop a strategy for improving early childhood learning and for raising public awareness. That effort must include incentives such as benefits, fair salaries, and tuition assistance to encourage young teachers to choose early childhood and to ensure quality pre-k for Alaska's children.

Is government doing enough to ensure access to pre-k for all? More than half of voters say government is doing too little.



Source: Hart Research Associates, October 2005 Survey

Serving Constituencies: Latinos and the Pre-K Teacher Corps

Nationwide, Latinos are the fastest growing segment of the population, currently numbering 40.2 million with expected growth of 1.7 million annually. And this is a predominantly young population: Nearly 50 percent of Latinos in the U.S. are under the age of nine.²² For state pre-k, this means the demand for services in Latino communities is outpacing capacity, and recent research indicates that programs are failing Latino children due largely to a shortage of teachers who are bilingual and trained in culturally appropriate teaching methods. For example:

- While Latino students comprise over 16 percent of public school students, only about 5 percent of public school teachers are Latino.²³
- Among pre-k providers who accept children with limited English proficiency (LEP), only 44 percent had a bilingual staff member.²⁴

Strategic professional development is the key to addressing these issues. While general requirements for LEP and cultural-awareness training are needed, the necessity of these skills presents an opportunity to further engage Latinos as both pre-k stakeholders and educators. Aggressive teacher recruitment within Latino communities is the surest way to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate services for Latino children. New Mexico, for example, has committed 20 percent of its pre-k appropriations to professional development with a focus on building a teacher corps that reflects its substantial Latino population.



9

Pre-K for All

Driven by research on brain development and the efficacy of early education, 41 states now offer some form of pre-k or provide state funding for *Head Start*. However, most of these are targeted programs, and together, as of the 2003 school year, reached only about ten percent of the nation's three and four year olds. Moreover, program quality varies both across and within states. Carefully crafted legislation can ensure a specific strategy and adequate funding for development of a high-quality pre-k system that meets the needs of all children.

Robert Plymale

West Virginia State Senator

Lawmakers' opportunities to improve a state's future are scarce, and too often we're merely reacting to a crisis rather than making proactive policy. On pre-k, West Virginia's leaders instead chose progressive action.



West Virginia

West Virginia has committed to guarantee access to pre-k for every four year old by fall 2012. The state currently serves 42 percent of its four year olds through collaborations between public schools, *Head Start*, and other early childhood providers.²⁵ In 2005, the legislature relieved school districts of the obligation to fund the inaugural year of pre-k, a provision that had hindered program development in several counties. These decisions codify in law what advocates have long known: high-quality pre-k benefits all children and is a sound investment.

West Virginia includes pre-k in its school funding formula, which assures stable funding and situates pre-k within the larger education system. The 2012 pre-k-for-all deadline, in conjunction with predictable, adequate funding from the school funding formula, allows the existing program to streamline delivery, improve quality, develop a qualified teacher corps, and institute accountability measures, all while working toward access for every four year old.



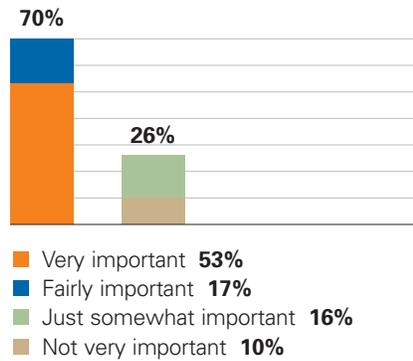
States Providing No Pre-k Services

Nine states continue to buck the pre-k trend. Most are western states: Montana, Wyoming, North and South Dakota, Idaho, and Utah all offer no state-funded pre-k, but not for lack of resources. In 2005, most of these states had budget surpluses. These states – except Idaho, where public education is constitutionally prohibited from serving children under five – are ideally positioned with small populations and substantial funds to quickly establish high-quality pre-k programs. They lack only the leadership.

The remaining states are holdouts within strong pre-k regions. While Southern states lead in quality and access, Mississippi, which ranks 50th in national educational assessments,²⁶ offers no state pre-k. Across New England, pre-k is expanding, but New Hampshire provides no program. And even as neighboring Illinois invests 90 million new dollars over three years, Indiana allocates no funds for pre-k.

2005 saw some positive signs in Mississippi, South Dakota, Idaho, and Wyoming, which Pre-K Now hopes will become genuine momentum in 2006.

**How important is organized learning for four year olds?
More than half of voters say
"very important."**



Source: Hart Research Associates, October 2005 Survey



Pre-K for All in Practice

Three states – Florida, Georgia, and Oklahoma – currently offer pre-k to every four year old. Quality, delivery, and funding vary,²⁷ and no services are offered for three year olds, but each state has made a commitment to pre-k that will pay dividends for years to come.

- Oklahoma's *Early Childhood Four-Year-Old Program*, started in 1980 and gradually expanded, sets the standard for high-quality pre-k for all, serving 64 percent of four year olds. Supported through the school funding formula, Oklahoma pre-k meets eight of ten quality benchmarks with most services provided in public schools. Recent studies found measurable gains in literacy and early math among participating children.²⁸

- Georgia's *Universal Pre-kindergarten* program reaches 56 percent of four year olds through a network of public schools and community-based providers. The program began in 1993 and, in 1995, became the first in the nation open to every four year old. Georgia pre-k meets six of ten quality benchmarks and is funded entirely with lottery proceeds. In a 2004 study, researchers found that children "across Georgia made significant gains from the beginning of preschool to the end of first grade...."²⁹
- Florida's *Universal Pre-K* program opened in fall 2005, the result of a ballot initiative. The inaugural appropriation of \$387 million – \$2,500 per child – is serving a remarkable 80,000 children but provides less than half the funding needed to achieve high quality.³⁰

10

Governance

Most states have no single pre-k system. Responsibility for early education is scattered across government agencies, funded with different resources, and delivered through multiple public and private entities at the state and municipal levels. This configuration can leave pre-k without professional, state-level personnel to oversee, promote, and develop the program. A coherent governance infrastructure is vital to ensuring a seamless educational experience for children and families. To that end, states must designate a governmental or quasi-governmental body that is both adequately skilled and sufficiently equipped to coordinate and monitor disparate program elements; articulate a vision of school readiness; develop a policy agenda; ensure accountability; and maintain a focus on young children.

Margaret Blood

President
Strategies for Children

To move this agenda forward, we had to ensure an efficient administrative structure, and the creation of the board and Department of Early Education and Care has addressed that challenge.



Massachusetts

In 2005, Massachusetts took a major step toward providing sound, responsible governance for its pre-k and other early childhood programs. On July 1, the functions of the Office of Child Care Services and the Early Learning Services Division of the Department of Education were combined under the new Department of Early Education and Care (EEC). The EEC is governed by an independent board of directors and administered by a commissioner appointed by the board.

By establishing the EEC, the state consolidated oversight, delivery, and accountability for all center, family childcare, infant, toddler, pre-k, and school-age providers under one agency, a move that promises to streamline, enhance, and accelerate delivery of high-quality pre-k to the state's children. EEC has outlined three primary focus areas for the coming year: fiscal stability; quality and workforce development; and increased access and service coordination, but the agency's mission also promises ongoing support for children through early care and education.³¹



New Jersey

New Jersey is required by the state supreme court decision, *Abbott v. Burke*, to provide high-quality pre-k to its most at-risk children. Currently, the state's 31 lowest-income school districts are served through the program. New Jersey also has two other pre-k programs, the *Early Launch to Learning Initiative* and *Early Childhood Program Aid*. Each program adheres to different quality standards and eligibility guidelines.

Coordination of these three separate pre-k programs, the network of public and private childcare providers, *Head Start*, and disability programs has worked thanks to strong individual leadership in the Department of Education and from the governor. However, the demands of so many disparate administrative entities may affect the growth and effectiveness of the pre-k system in future years.

New Jersey must consolidate pre-k and other early education programs under a unified infrastructure that relies less upon individual leadership and establishes a cohesive administrative structure.

Conclusion

Led by committed early childhood advocates who understand the complexities of the contemporary political landscape, the movement for high-quality, voluntary, state-funded pre-k for all – at its best – engenders responsible, bipartisan legislating, innovative fiscal policy, and creative, effective community leadership. These are some of the qualities that characterize a successful pre-k effort.

Pre-K and Politics 2005 recognizes the inspired strategies advocates and other leaders have used to build, support, and improve pre-k in their states. Our goal is to invigorate and enhance pre-k efforts in other states by sharing approaches that have produced real gains for children. At the same time, by calling attention to states where progress has been slow, policymaking ineffectual, or advocacy lackluster, we hope to spur new thinking in those states and steer other states away from unsound tactics.

Nationwide, the trend toward pre-k has been positive and maintaining that momentum requires proven, political strategies, strong leadership, and a firm commitment to building a brighter future for all our children.



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