



Preschool Key to Boosting School Success and Enhancing Public Safety

The nation could realize billions in societal benefits by increasing access to high-quality preschool programs

The law enforcement leaders of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids have advocated for 25 years for investments in policies and programs that put kids on the path toward productive lives. We know that one of the best ways to keep young people from becoming involved in crime later on is to make sure they have a foundation for educational success in their earliest years. In particular, by providing access to high-quality preschool education for kids today, we can see less crime and incarceration in the future, while reaping enormous economic and societal benefits. Federal policymakers must help our country realize these benefits by investing in early education for our nation's children.

High-quality early education helps prevent crime

Research shows that the experiences children have in their earliest years, during a period of

critical brain growth, set the foundation for future development and success.¹ Voluntary, quality preschool education can improve academic performance—including high school graduation—and reduce the risk that participants will become involved in crime later. Decades of research, across numerous states, show the short- and long-term benefits of high-quality preschool for children's development, particularly for children from families with low incomes.²

School readiness and success

Children who attend high-quality preschool are more likely to arrive at kindergarten ready to learn, with enhanced early math, language, and literacy skills.³ They are also less likely to be held back in school or to need special education,⁴ and more likely to be proficient in reading and math (higher test scores).⁵ Preschool participants also have an increased probability of graduating from high school.⁶

The fact that six out of 10 prisoners nationwide do not have a high school diploma illustrates the connection between education and crime prevention.⁷

Decreased behavior problems

Students who participate in high-quality preschool are less likely to have behavioral infractions in elementary and middle school and to be suspended from high school.⁸ Research has demonstrated a link between childhood behavior problems and later crime,⁹ underscoring the significance of these findings.

Reduction in crime and incarceration

Some long-term studies directly examine the link between preschool participation and crime prevention. A recent MIT study of the Boston preschool program found that enrollees were less likely to have been incarcerated in a juvenile facility during high school, compared to non-enrollees.¹⁰ Children not served by the Chicago Child-Parent Centers (CPC) early education program were 70 percent more likely to be arrested for a violent crime by age 18.¹¹ By age 24, the people served by the CPC were 20 percent less likely to have served time in jail or prison.¹² A study of Oklahoma's preschool program found that it significantly decreased the likelihood that Black children were later charged with a misdemeanor or felony crime at age 18 or 19.¹³ Another analysis found that Black children who participated in Head Start were less likely to engage in crime in their early 20s.¹⁴

Demonstrated economic benefits

An independent cost-benefit analysis of universal preschool programs showed that they can return, on average, a “profit” (economic benefits minus costs) to society



of more than \$15,000 for every child served (or approximately \$3 for every dollar spent). The benefits accrue due to increased test scores, which are associated with higher earnings in adulthood, as well as decreases in costs to society, such as children being held back in school or needing special education.¹⁵

A previous cost-benefit analysis by the same researchers found that the “profit” increased to more than \$22,000 per child served when preschool programs targeted children from low-income families and the calculation included the programs’ benefits due to crime reduction.¹⁶

Applying the estimated \$15,000 per child net benefit to the approximately six million additional children who would be served by expanding preschool,¹⁷ our **nation could realize a return on investment of \$90 billion** over the lifetime of these children (See table for state estimates).¹⁸

States' Return on Investment from Expanding Preschool

Billions in higher earnings and reduced costs to society

	Additional children served	Net benefits (\$15,000/child)		Additional children served	Net benefits (\$15,000/child)
ALABAMA	105,000	\$1.57 BILLION	MISSOURI	116,000	\$1.74 BILLION
ALASKA	15,000	\$225 MILLION	MONTANA	16,000	\$240 MILLION
ARIZONA	134,000	\$2.01 BILLION	NEBRASKA	51,000	\$765 MILLION
ARKANSAS	51,000	\$765 MILLION	NEVADA	66,000	\$990 MILLION
CALIFORNIA	781,000	\$11.71 BILLION	NEW HAMPSHIRE	24,000	\$360 MILLION
COLORADO	86,000	\$1.29 BILLION	NEW JERSEY	128,000	\$1.92 BILLION
CONNECTICUT	53,000	\$795 MILLION	NEW MEXICO	31,000	\$465 MILLION
DELAWARE	18,000	\$270 MILLION	NEW YORK	298,000	\$4.47 BILLION
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA	7,300	\$109.5 MILLION	NORTH CAROLINA	154,000	\$2.31 BILLION
FLORIDA	347,000	\$5.2 BILLION	NORTH DAKOTA	18,000	\$270 MILLION
GEORGIA	183,000	\$2.74 BILLION	OHIO	151,000	\$2.26 BILLION
HAWAII	30,000	\$450 MILLION	OKLAHOMA	61,000	\$915 MILLION
IDAHO	40,000	\$600 MILLION	OREGON	77,500	\$1.16 BILLION
ILLINOIS	249,000	\$3.73 BILLION	PENNSYLVANIA	200,000	\$3.7 BILLION
INDIANA	184,000	\$2.76 BILLION	RHODE ISLAND	15,000	\$225 MILLION
IOWA	52,000	\$780 MILLION	SOUTH CAROLINA	74,000	\$1.11 BILLION
KANSAS	47,000	\$705 MILLION	SOUTH DAKOTA	19,000	\$285 MILLION
KENTUCKY	98,000	\$1.47 BILLION	TENNESSEE	145,500	\$2.18 BILLION
LOUISIANA	54,500	\$817.5 MILLION	TEXAS	571,000	\$8.56 BILLION
MAINE	16,000	\$240 MILLION	UTAH	87,000	\$1.3 BILLION
MARYLAND	138,000	\$2.07 BILLION	VERMONT	6,000	\$90 MILLION
MASSACHUSETTS	137,000	\$2.05 BILLION	VIRGINIA	129,000	\$1.93 BILLION
MICHIGAN	219,000	\$3.28 BILLION	WASHINGTON	181,000	\$2.71 BILLION
MINNESOTA	156,500	\$2.347 BILLION	WEST VIRGINIA	28,000	\$420 MILLION
MISSISSIPPI	53,000	\$795 MILLION	WISCONSIN	85,000	\$1.27 BILLION
			WYOMING	8,600	\$129 MILLION
TOTAL US		6,000,000	Additional children served		Net benefits (\$15,000/child)
		>\$90 BILLION			

Source: Fight Crime: Invest in Kids calculations from White House data.

Federal policymakers must invest in early education

Given the myriad benefits of high-quality early education programs, including crime prevention, federal policymakers must work to increase access to these programs. Solutions must address how a federal-state preschool system would interact with the child care system, which often relies on the tuition it receives from 3-and 4-year olds to counterbalance the higher cost of infant-and-toddler care.

High-quality early education provides one of the best ways to set children on the path to success and help them avoid becoming involved in crime later. Congress should act to bolster the early education system, to reap economic and societal benefits, including increased public safety.



Fight Crime: Invest in Kids

Thousands of police chiefs, sheriffs, prosecutors and violence survivors protecting public safety by promoting solutions that steer kids away from crime.

Council for a Strong America is a national, bipartisan nonprofit that unites five organizations comprised of law enforcement leaders, retired admirals and generals, business executives, faith leaders, and prominent coaches and athletes who promote solutions that ensure our next generation of Americans will be successful, productive members of society.

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Endnotes

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