



Law Enforcement Agrees: High-Quality Pre-K is Crime Prevention

Acknowledgements

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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

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Summary

While no child is destined at birth to end up in jail, the road to criminal behavior is paved with such challenges as poverty, childhood abuse and neglect, deficient parenting, inadequate preparation for school, unaddressed behavior problems, poor academic performance and, ultimately, dropping out of school and engaging in crime. All too often these problems can plague families for generations.

Law enforcement leaders know that one of the best ways to keep young people from committing crime later on is to make sure they have a foundation for success in their earliest years. By providing access to high-quality early education for kids today, we can see less crime and incarceration in the future while reaping millions in taxpayer savings and other economic benefits.

This is why Pennsylvania's century-old law enforcement associations—the Pennsylvania District Attorneys Association, the Pennsylvania Sheriffs' Association, and the Pennsylvania Chiefs of Police Association—have partnered with Fight Crime: Invest in Kids for almost 20 years in supporting greater access to high-quality pre-kindergarten in order to help break the generational cycle of crime.

The path to success in life is driven by school readiness, the ability to get along with others and regulate and control behavior, respect for authority, academic achievement, and pathways to meaningful careers. Research shows high-quality pre-k is an important part of that progression. A study that followed children who participated in a high-quality pre-k and “parent-coaching” program through Chicago's Child-Parent Centers found that children not served by the program were 70 percent more likely to be arrested for a violent crime by age 18 than those who participated.



While we know that “crime doesn’t pay,” Pennsylvania does pay for crime. Even though overall crime rates are decreasing in many jurisdictions, Pennsylvania is still spending nearly \$3.2 billion annually on incarcerating adults at the local and state levels.

Quality pre-k programs return an average “profit” (economic benefits minus costs) to society of up to \$27,000 for every child served. The analysis measured the economic benefits of both cutting crime and the cost of incarceration, reducing other costs such as special education and grade retention, and increasing participants’ future wages. Applying that cost savings estimate to the 5,500 additional low-income Pennsylvanian children

who would be served by the proposed \$50 million funding increase for the Pre-K Counts and Head Start State Supplemental Assistance programs in 2019-2020 state budget could realize Pennsylvania almost \$150 million in societal benefits over their lifetimes.

Pennsylvania’s law enforcement leaders believe that government’s most fundamental responsibility is to protect the public safety. Government cannot fully meet this responsibility, however, without making sure that Pennsylvania’s most at-risk children have access to interventions that will help form the foundations of productive and law-abiding lives. We have got a choice today, and it boils down to dollars and common sense. If we invest in our kids today, we will pay far less for the costs of crime and lack of educational success in the years to come. That’s being “smart” on crime.

Too Many Children Are Falling Behind Before They Start School

Fortunately, we can steer thousands of Pennsylvania’s children toward more successful lives through high-quality early education that research has shown can lead to less child abuse and neglect, better performance in school, fewer high school dropouts and, ultimately, fewer crimes committed and a reduction in the number of prisoners.

The research behind these outcomes shows that the early childhood period (birth to age 5) is a time of rapid brain development, with more than one million new brain connections forming every second.¹² Early experiences play a large role in determining how brain connections are formed and in the “wiring” that becomes the foundation on which all later learning is built.

Some children face challenges in learning to control impulses and behavior so they can get along with other students and teachers. High-quality early education and care can help these children get on track, both academically and socially, so they will be ready for kindergarten, despite these early deficits. High-quality early childhood programs also engage with parents, to support them in their role as their children's first teachers.

James Heckman, the Nobel Prize-winning economist from the University of Chicago, has conducted groundbreaking work with economists, statisticians and neuroscientists and has demonstrated that the quality of early childhood development strongly influences health, social and economic outcomes. He argues that we should invest sufficiently in younger children—including pre-k—and in providing “coaching” for their parents because those early investments will pay off later on by establishing kids on a path to be successful adults.¹³

The Pathway to Less Crime

The path we set children upon in their earliest years can make a huge difference as they proceed through school and beyond. Research has shown that high-quality early education and care from birth through pre-k will result in more successful outcomes:

1. Less child abuse and neglect:

The Chicago Child-Parent Centers (CPC) is a pre-k program that has served over 100,000 children and followed a sample of them up to age 28. This program also coaches parents to help them understand their children's health needs, create safer home environments and develop parenting skills. CPC cut child abuse and neglect

Pennsylvania spends \$3.2 billion on corrections each year



Although crime rates have fallen over the past 20 years, including in Pennsylvania, there are still 1.2 million violent crimes and 8 million property crimes committed against people in our communities across America every year. **More than 40,400 violent crimes are committed annually in Pennsylvania, which is a rate of 313 per 100,000 people.¹**

Pennsylvania had just over 47,000 inmates in Department of Corrections jurisdiction as of January 2019.²



Nationally, we spend \$182 billion on incarceration and associated costs, such as court and policing expenses as well as costs incurred by families of incarcerated individuals.³ Pennsylvania spends almost **\$3.2 billion a year on incarcerating adults at the state and local levels,⁴** and almost \$43,000 per state prison inmate,⁵ which is almost three times what the state spends on its public students annually (\$15,418),⁶ and more than five times what is spent on preschool students (\$8,500).⁷

Six out of 10 prisoners nationwide do not have a high school diploma and finding employment after incarceration is very challenging.⁸ In Pennsylvania, **42 percent of incoming inmates have less than a 12th grade education.**

Some inmates continue their education in prison, so 26.3 percent of current state prison inmates have less than a 12th grade education and the average reading level is upper 8th grade.⁹ Dropouts in Pennsylvania annually consume \$683 more than they contribute in taxes.¹⁰ Moreover, Pennsylvania could “see a combination of crime-related savings and additional revenue of about \$785 million annually if the male high school graduation rate increased by just five percent.”¹¹



in half for the children served, compared with similar children from families not being helped.¹⁴

2. Fewer behavior problems:

Pennsylvania's Pre-K Counts Public-Private Partnership program (the precursor to the current Pre-K Counts program) cut—from 22 percent to 4 percent—the portion of children at risk for problematic social and self-control behavior.¹⁵ This program was also found to help children learn self-control and self regulating behaviors, which leads to fewer of those children needing special education later on.

3. Better school outcomes:

- **Ready for school:** Boston's pre-k program improved mathematics, literacy and language skills among participating children equivalent to seven months of additional learning, compared with children who did not attend.¹⁶ State pre-k programs are also reporting similar important improvements in academic skills among their children that matriculate from their programs.¹⁷
- **Not Held Back in School:** Participants in Michigan's state pre-k, the Great Start Readiness Program, were held back in school 51 percent less often than non-participants.¹⁸ New Jersey's pre-k program found its children were held back 40 percent less often.¹⁹
- **Increases in reading and math scores that persist:** North Carolina's Smart Start and More at Four initiatives to improve early education found that the children in counties that spent more per student were two months ahead in reading at fifth grade and 1.5 months ahead in math by fifth grade when compared with children in counties that spent less per student.²⁰ New Jersey's pre-k program, which served disadvantaged school districts

statewide, reported that participating children were three-fourths of a year ahead in math and two-thirds of a year ahead in literacy in fourth and fifth grades.²¹ These findings show that academic gains from high-quality pre-k continue to have a positive impact for students, and that investing in early education will lead to greater academic achievements later on. The New Jersey researchers report that their findings are on par with the earlier results achieved by Chicago's CPC program, which later went on to achieve very strong graduation and crime reduction outcomes.

4. Fewer dropouts:

- The Chicago CPC pre-k program reported a 29 percent increase in high school graduation rates by age 20 among its participants;²²
- Michigan's Great Start Readiness program reported a 35 percent increase in graduates,²³ and
- Michigan's Perry Pre-K Program saw a 44 percent increase in graduation rates.²⁴

Increasing graduation rates decreases serious crime

Economists Enrico Moretti and Lance Lochner studied the relationship over time between changes in graduation rates and crime. They concluded that a 10 percentage-point increase in graduation rates—going from 50 percent to 60 percent, for example—reduces murder and assault rates by about 20 percent.

Source: Lochner & Moretti (2004) *The American Economic Review*

It's significant to note that in Pennsylvania, 14 percent of high school students still fail to graduate in four years.²⁵

5. Less crime:

- Children not served by the Chicago CPC program were 70 percent more likely to be arrested for a violent crime by age 18.²⁶
- A recent study of Oklahoma's universal Pre-K program found the program decreases the likelihood that black children are later charged with a crime at

age 18 or 19 for both misdemeanors and felonies.²⁷

- By age 27, children not served by the Perry Pre-K Program were **five times more likely to be chronic offenders, with five or more arrests.**²⁸

6. Fewer prisoners:

- By age 24, the **people served by the Chicago CPC were 20 percent less likely to have served time in a jail or prison.**²⁹

Three Pennsylvania law enforcement leaders, each with decades of experience, were interviewed by Fight Crime: Invest in Kids. These conversations, which are summarized and edited for length, are their personal viewpoints and were not offered as official law enforcement association statements.



SCOTT L. BOHN

**CHIEF OF POLICE, WEST CHESTER POLICE DEPARTMENT;
PRESIDENT, PENNSYLVANIA CHIEFS OF POLICE
ASSOCIATION**

West Chester Chief of Police Scott Bohn has seen a lot of trends come and go in his 33-year law enforcement career, 32 of which have been in West Chester with almost 19 as Chief. Regardless, he believes that there are evidence-based programs that make a

difference in the lives of children and families in the Commonwealth and investing in high-quality pre-k programs is one of them.

He notes that the state spends over \$2 billion a year to incarcerate inmates (more than \$40,000 per inmate), which is about three times more per year that we spend on our K-12 students, and five times more than we spend on pre-k students. Chief Bohn believes that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, and that in order to stop pumping increasing amounts of money into incarceration, we need to put more resources up front where we can see a positive impact for our communities, even if it is in the long run.

"Partnerships are critically important in preventing crime and unwanted behavior in our communities," says Chief Bohn. "A strong parental component is key. Education is such a critical component in all of our programming, especially for our disadvantaged youth, so that they do not fall behind, take the wrong path, or become victimized themselves. If you are a Pennsylvania taxpayer and look at the results we see from high-quality pre-k programs, you realize it is a really smart return on your investment."

- By age 40, the children served by the Perry Pre-K program were **46 percent less likely to have been sentenced to prison or jail.**³⁰

Findings from Pennsylvania Incoming State Prisoner Survey

An optional background survey was administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections to all incoming male inmates who were beginning to serve their sentences between January 8, 2018 and February 2, 2018. Of the 528 new inmates, 496 completed the survey, resulting in a 94 percent participation rate. The following summarizes some of the notable findings.

School Suspension

58 percent of respondents who were suspended in elementary school dropped out of high school, compared to a lower dropout rate of 47 percent among those that were not suspended. Suspension also appears to be linked to teenage arrest rates. Among those who were suspended in middle school, 58 percent were arrested as a juvenile and 48 percent were arrested and found guilty as a juvenile, compared with only 40 and 33 percent, respectively, of the prisoners who were not suspended. Moreover, among prisoners who were suspended in high school, 61 percent were arrested as a juvenile and 50 percent were arrested and found guilty, with both proportions being close to double the rates of participants that were not suspended, at 37 and 31 percent, respectively. **Lastly, 53 percent of prisoners who were suspended in elementary school were placed in a residential juvenile justice program compared to 30 percent that were not suspended.**



We are tough on criminals because public safety is our top priority. But if investing in high-quality pre-k keeps kids from turning into criminals, that both saves us money and forms kids into productive and law-abiding adults.”

Thomas P. Hogan

Chester County District Attorney

School Expulsion: Among prisoners that were expelled from school, **64 percent ultimately did not complete high school compared to a 45 percent high school incompleteness rate among participants that were not expelled.** Moreover, 59 percent of expellees were arrested as a juvenile, 53 percent were arrested and found guilty, and 49 percent were placed in a residential juvenile justice program, compared to 42 percent, 34 percent, and 29 percent among prisoners who were not expelled.

Academics: Having difficulty reading in elementary school is associated with trouble later in life, given that among prisoners that experienced this difficulty,

50 percent were arrested as a juvenile, 42 percent were arrested and found guilty, and 38 percent were placed in a residential juvenile justice program, compared to 44, 36, and 30 percent, respectively, among those that did not have difficulty reading. Moreover, among those that had difficulty reading, 65 percent were suspended and 33 percent were expelled, compared to a 51 percent suspension rate and 15 percent expulsion

rate among those that did not have difficulty reading. Having difficulty reading also is associated with participants' academic experience, as 76 percent of those with difficulty reading skipped school, and 34 percent got in trouble in elementary school, compared to 59 and 24 percent, respectively. **Family involvement may have had an impact on prisoners' academic success, as those who had someone involved in their learning had lower rates**



KENNETH KLAKAMP

**WARREN COUNTY SHERIFF;
PRESIDENT OF THE PENNSYLVANIA SHERIFFS'
ASSOCIATION**

Warren County Sheriff Kenneth Klakamp has seen and experienced a great deal in more than four decades in the Sheriff's office, first as a Deputy, then Chief Deputy and then as elected Sheriff since 2012. A strong believer in keeping kids busy and

parents engaged to prevent crime, he often sees people at their lowest points—whether they're facing a judge in court or being transported to or from the County jail. All too often, offenders are third or even fourth generation family members who have gotten in trouble with the law. A lack of parenting skills really perpetuates the cycle—so if caregivers can't parent and discipline appropriately, bad behavior by their young children can be for attention-seeking that continues on, rather than being nipped in the bud.

"Every child is worthy," says Klakamp. "They are our greatest asset and our future leaders, but if we aren't giving them a chance, then we don't get a chance." That's why he supports high-quality pre-k programs, which help to instill good behavior and social norms and to put children on early paths to educational success. He notes from his experience that some children, unfortunately, don't get the emotional support and attention at home that they need to become good citizens. A high-quality pre-k program helps meet that need for positive affirmation and attention, while also supporting parents in developing appropriate skills. "Let's get them young and then you have a chance to curb some of this negative behavior. Because if you wait until they're teenagers, it's a lot harder to change."

"Every child is worthy. They are our greatest asset and our future leaders, but if we aren't giving them a chance, then we don't get a chance."

of dropping out of school (47 percent) and having difficulty reading in school (20 percent), compared to those that did not have anyone involved in their learning (55 and 29 percent, respectively).

Family Substance Abuse: Having a family member who had a substance abuse problem is associated with myriad negative later-in-life outcomes. **Among prisoners in this category, 56 percent were arrested as a juvenile, 47 percent were arrested and found guilty, compared to 40 and 33 percent, respectively, among those who**

did not have any substance abuse in their family. Moreover, 69 percent of participants with family substance usage were suspended in school, with 41 percent being suspended in middle school and 46 percent being suspended in high school, compared to 49, 27, and 31 percent, respectively, among prisoners that did not have any substance abuse issues in the family. Additionally, 34 percent got in trouble in elementary school and 26 percent were expelled from school, compared to 23 percent and 17 percent, respectively, among prisoners who did not have any substance usage in the family.



HON. FRANCIS T. CHARDO

DAUPHIN COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY

Dauphin County District Attorney Fran Chardo has made a long career serving the citizens of Dauphin County. He joined the District Attorney's office as a Deputy DA in 1994, became First Assistant DA in 2003 and then was appointed District

Attorney in January 2018. Chardo has seen the cycle of imprisonment play out among families in Dauphin County. "If children do not have early positive influences and see parents being committed to a jail or prison as 'the way life is' rather than as a life-changing event, it can be easy for them to go down the same road."

Early intervention in the form of a high-quality pre-k program is a vital early step in establishing the right path, not only in providing a stable, nurturing environment for children living in adverse circumstances, but also for developing parental support." A parent himself, Chardo points out that every child is different, and there is no one-size-fits-all approach to parenting. "The more help you can get parents, the better, no matter their situation. High-quality pre-k programs can help parents be more appropriately engaged in their child's life during the critical formative years."

"The more help you can get parents, the better, no matter their situation. High-quality pre-k programs can help parents be more appropriately engaged in their child's life during the critical formative years."

It All Adds Up

No baby is destined, at birth, to become a criminal. The road to criminal behavior is paved with such challenges as poverty, childhood abuse and neglect, poor social and emotional development, unaddressed behavior problems, poor academic performance and dropping out of high school. The path to success in life is driven by school readiness, the ability to get along with others, academic achievement and high school graduation. Pennsylvania needs to continue building on its investments in high-quality pre-k to ensure that more children have the opportunity for quality early education and care to help them become productive and law-abiding citizens.

Stronger parents

The most successful early childhood programs with long-term results—such as the Perry Preschool, CPC and New Jersey’s state pre-k—work with parents to teach them how to reinforce positive behaviors and encourage them to routinely read and speak to their children so they are better prepared for success in the years to come.

Parents are their children’s first and most important teachers. However, some parents do not have the knowledge or experience necessary to fully support their children’s development. High-quality early childhood programs partner with parents to help them improve their children’s academic and behavioral outcomes as well as promote family engagement by developing strategies to support parents’ involvement in children’s early learning.³¹

Quality is Key

Results from New Jersey, North Carolina and Michigan should effectively end the debate on whether high-quality state pre-k efforts can be brought to scale and deliver strong and lasting results. To attain lasting results, programs must be high quality. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation describes 15 research-based “essential elements of high-quality pre-k” that move beyond program inputs to examine what actually happens in the classroom, particularly the quality of teacher-child interactions and teacher instruction.³² **The heart of any program is the interaction between the teacher and the child. To be able to deliver an evidence-based curriculum that supports all aspects of children’s development: cognitive, physical, social and emotional, teachers must be well-trained and receive quality, ongoing professional development training.**

The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) maintains a standards checklist for program features that support quality focusing on teacher credentials and training, class size, teacher-child ratios, learning standards, screening and other services, and program oversight. Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts meets 8 of 10 newly-revised, more stringent NIEER key benchmarks for quality, while the Pennsylvania Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program meets 7 of 10.³³

Pennsylvania Must Expand Access to Pre-k

There are 173,570 children ages 3 and 4 who are eligible for Pennsylvania’s publicly-funded pre-k programs. Of those, 97,702 (56 percent) do not have access to high quality, publicly-funded pre-k.³⁴ They are missing out on the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that will provide a solid foundation for future learning as well as the aforementioned benefits that high-quality pre-k is shown to provide.



Demonstrated Economic Benefits

A well-respected, independent cost-benefit analysis of nearly 20 different studies of high-quality pre-k programs showed that pre-k can return, on average, a “profit” (economic benefits minus costs) to society of more than \$27,000 for every child served.³⁵ Applying these benefits to the 5,500 children who would be served by the Pre-K Counts and the Head Start State Supplemental Program increases that Governor Wolf has proposed for the 2019-2020 state budget, Pennsylvania could realize a return of approximately \$148.5 million over the lifetime of these children. These economic benefits accrue due largely to reductions in the cost of future crime and increases in participants’ future wages, as well as decreases in other costs to society, such as children being held back in school or receiving special education. Other estimates of benefits are much higher. These benefits would accrue for each new cohort of children served by high-quality pre-k. Clearly, pre-k works and more than pays for itself.

Conclusion

As law enforcement leaders, our job is to arrest and put those who commit serious crimes behind bars in Pennsylvania. **But we *all* agree that a better and less expensive way to stop crime going forward is to prevent as many young children as possible from growing up to become involved in crime in the first place.**

Pennsylvania’s law enforcement leaders urge policymakers to invest further in improving access to our state’s high-quality early education programs. If Pennsylvania continues to invest wisely in quality pre-k opportunities for its disadvantaged children, thousands of children can become successful, productive adults, instead of individuals with wasted potential. When we support what works for our disadvantaged children, we put them—and our state—on an improved and safer path. We must continue to invest in what works.

We urge the General Assembly to adopt a final budget for the 2019-2020 fiscal year that includes an additional \$40 million for Pre-K Counts and \$10 million for the Head Start State Supplemental Assistance Program to provide high-quality, publicly funded pre-k to an additional 5,500 at-risk children.

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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, pastors, and prominent coaches and athletes who promote solutions that ensure our next generation of Americans will be citizen-ready.

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