



WHAT STATE LEADERS CAN DO

- Increase the child care subsidy rate to reflect the true cost of caring for babies
- Expand high-quality preschool to reach more children in low-income communities across the state

Invest in a strong start to improve life outcomes for our youngest children.

In New Jersey, investing in early education for children from infancy to age 5 is money well-spent. The early years are the most critical time for brain development, establishing a strong foundation for future school success. Children who have access to high-quality early education are better prepared to start kindergarten ready to learn. They are less likely to need special education or be held back in school. Studies continue to show that investments in early education reap considerable savings in the long-run.

Improve Child Care Quality

Child care is early education for our youngest children, from infancy to age 3. With 66 percent of New Jersey's very young children having parents in the workforce, more than 207,000 infants and toddlers spend a large part of their day in child care. This is the time to ensure that their healthy growth and development includes well-trained teachers, safe environments, appropriate and adequate supplies, and small class size.

Sadly, these high-quality learning environments are not readily available, especially for children whose families need assistance to cover the cost of child care. Centers are struggling with low child care subsidy rates, which have not been increased for nearly a decade, making it impossible to hire qualified teachers, pay adequate salaries and cover costs. Centers caring for infants receive a subsidy rate of just \$160 per week – or \$4 an hour per child and it does not account for the stricter requirements for infant care, making it even more difficult for providers to pay for the high costs to serve babies.

These challenges have limited the availability of child care, especially for our youngest children. There are spaces in licensed child care centers for fewer than 27 percent of babies with parents in the workforce. Parents may choose to make other arrangements, such as family members or informal family child care. This still leaves gaps in child care for a lot of children.

The lack of child care options is a lost opportunity for children at a time most critical for their growth and development. Investing in quality child care not only helps our youngest children thrive, but also makes our economy stronger. Without child care, parents cannot work and businesses struggle to hire and retain a competent workforce. Access, affordability and quality are key.

What can state leaders do?

Increase funding for child care subsidies. Bring subsidy rates up to 2017 costs and implement a system with higher subsidy rates for higher quality.

First step: Start by increasing funding by \$40 million to provide higher subsidies to programs that care for babies. These programs are not currently reimbursed at a subsidy rate that reflects the higher cost of providing child care for babies.

Number of children who will benefit: 10,000

Expand Preschool

Fully fund the school funding formula

#NJVOTES4KIDS

Use #NJVotes4kids to join the discussion on children's issues in the 2017 state elections.



Give more children a strong start with preschool

Right now, 35 New Jersey communities – those with high concentrations of low-income children—receive state funding to provide high-quality preschool for all their 3- and 4-year-olds. By next year, a handful more will join them.

Every year, 51,000 children in these communities benefit from a program with highly trained teachers, small class size, appropriate curricula and teaching materials. Year after year, these children move to kindergarten better prepared for school. The results are clear. Test scores are higher and students continue to function at a higher level as they move through elementary school.

But not all children who can benefit most from high-quality preschool have access to a program in their community. Since state funding is available only to those 35 school districts, zip code determines who can attend and who cannot. The new state budget adds \$25 million more for preschool, but thousands of kids are still missing out.

New Jersey has already addressed this inequity by including preschool expansion in the 2008 School Funding Reform Act. Unfortunately, the law, which would have provided high-quality preschool to 50,000 more children in disadvantaged communities, was never funded. Recent federal funding has provided preschool to a limited number of children in a handful of school districts, but this funding ends in 2018. **We urge the next governor and lawmakers to make early care and education a priority.**



What can state leaders do?

Fully fund the school funding formula so that all children promised preschool can benefit from the program.

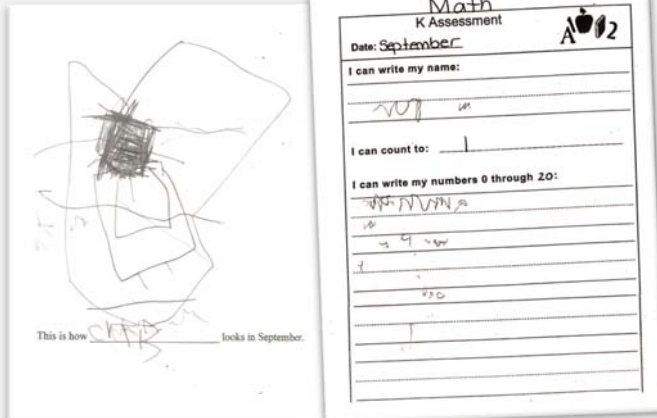
First step: Start with the 16 school districts that have limited federal funds to provide high-quality preschool to some children. Funding will ensure preschool continues after the federal dollars run out next year and expand access to serve all preschoolers, not just the limited number in the program now.

Fully funding preschool in these districts would cost \$86 million annually.

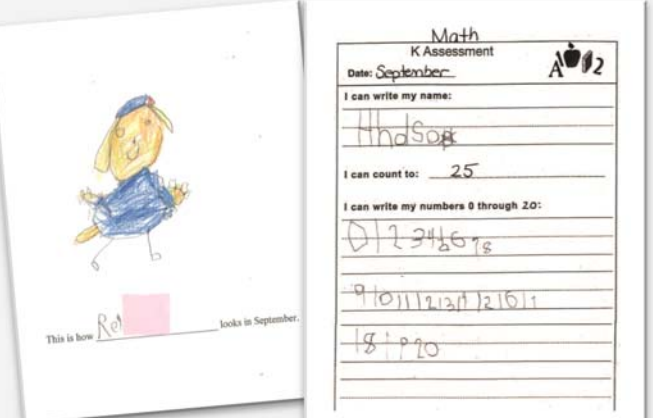
Number of children who will benefit: 6,500

Preschool builds core academic and school readiness skills to prepare kids for success!

Work by kindergarten student who has **not** attended preschool



Work by kindergarten student who has attended NJ's high-quality state-funded preschool



Giving Every Child A Chance

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