

EARLY LEARNING ILLINOIS

Preschool for All Frequently Asked Questions

access. options. opportunities.

Q: What is Preschool for All?

A: Preschool for All is Governor Blagojevich's five-year plan to make Illinois the first state to offer voluntary, high-quality preschool to all three- and four-year-olds, as well as expand support for at-risk infants and toddlers. The goal of Preschool for All is to ensure that all children are well prepared to succeed in school and in life. Preschool for All is built on the platform of the Early Childhood Block Grant program and expands it to reach all children. Preschool for All will also continue to set aside 11 cents of every preschool dollar for infants and toddlers ages birth to three-years-old who face the greatest challenges.

Preschool for All is not a new program. Rather, it builds on Illinois' early childhood education foundation of child care, State Pre-Kindergarten and Head Start. Preschool for All enhances the 20-year-old State Pre-Kindergarten program to reach more children and improve quality and accountability in the schools, community organizations and private providers that are expected to participate. Children at risk of school failure will be the first priority during Preschool for All's implementation, but within five years, all Illinois three- and four-year-olds will have access to preschool if their parents want them to participate.

Q: Why do we need Preschool for All?


A: Reason #1: Thousands of children whose parents want them to have preschool do not have access. There are not enough spaces in existing programs for at-risk children, and there are many families who do not qualify for public programs but cannot afford access to a quality private preschool.


Reason #2: Children who get quality preschool are better prepared for success in school and in life. Research shows that children who participate in high-quality early learning programs have better language, math and social skills than their peers who have missed this opportunity.


Reason #3: Preschool investments make dollars spent on the K-12 years more productive. Children who get preschool are ready to succeed in kindergarten, have less need for expensive interventions like special education and are more likely to graduate high school. Early learning is not in competition with K-12 education – it is the first step toward lifelong learning!


Q: Who benefits from Preschool for All?


A: Preschool for All benefits all Illinoisans.

 *Children.* Children who get quality early learning experiences are ready to succeed in school, have fewer special education needs, are more likely to graduate and earn more as adults.

 *Low-income and working families.* Only 47 percent of children from middle- and lower-income families go to preschool, compared to 66 percent of children from upper-income families. Preschool for All opens doors for all children.

 *Early childhood educators.* Preschool for All creates professional development opportunities, improves program quality and enables practitioners to earn more by enhancing their qualifications.

 *Elementary schools.* Children who attend high-quality preschool programs learn academic and social skills that enable them to enter kindergarten ready and eager to learn.

 *Existing early learning and child care programs.* Preschool for All will provide new resources for programs to serve more children, stabilize and improve staff and collaborate with other programs.

Q: How many children will benefit from Preschool for All?

A: When fully implemented, Preschool for All will ensure that 190,000 children in Illinois have access to voluntary, high-quality preschool. This estimate includes children who are already served in existing state PreKindergarten, Head Start and PreK Special Education programs. Over the next three years, funding will be used to serve 32,000 additional three- and four-year-olds. The Governor will request additional funding in fiscal years 2010 and 2011 to extend preschool to remaining children whose parents would like them to participate.

Q: What kinds of programs will offer Preschool for All?

A: Parents will be able to access Preschool for All programs in a variety of settings. A broad range of service providers – non-profit and for-profit child care centers and licensed child care homes, school district PreK and Early Childhood Special Ed programs, Head Start, public and private nursery schools, park districts, etc. – all will be able to apply directly for Preschool for All funds.





Yet while Preschool for All programs will be offered in diverse settings, the core components will be consistent. All Preschool for All programs will meet the same high standards and will benefit from quality and accountability enhancements recommended by the Early Learning Council. School-based, center-based, and community-based programs funded through Preschool for All would provide at least 12.5 hours of preschool instruction, with a maximum of 5 days per week. Parents could choose to send their children for less time, or they could arrange to extend a child's day using their own funds or a child care subsidy if they qualify.

Q: How is Preschool for All funded and what does it pay for?

A: Governor Blagojevich has asked the legislature to increase funding by \$45 million a year over the next three years to support expansion of the Early Childhood Block Grant beginning in fiscal year 2007. According to the Governor's Office, expansion will be funded through natural revenue growth and savings realized by closing business loopholes and tapping other surplus funds. In addition to serving more children, Preschool for All funds pay for quality and accountability enhancements recommended by the Illinois Early Learning Council. Preschool for All also continues the 11 percent set-aside for at-risk infants and toddlers.

Q: What economic benefits will Preschool for All generate?

A: While the objective of Preschool for All is to help children, it is also sound economic policy:

-  Early childhood development yields economic development, offering a 16 percent rate of return. (Art Rolnick, Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis)
-  Researchers estimate the average benefits of preschool at \$25,000 per child over their lifetime. (National Institute for Early Education Research)
-  Analysis shows that each \$1 invested in early learning yields \$7 in reduced public expenditures for special education, truancy, and criminal justice. (Dr. Arthur Reynolds, University of Wisconsin)
-  Early learning gains are sustainable beyond the preschool years, as indicated by academic achievement, graduation rates and college attendance. (Longitudinal studies by the Chicago Child Parent Centers, High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, and Abecedarian Preschool Project)

Q: Why do we need to act now?

A: Children cannot wait. Illinois has a unique opportunity to dramatically improve the future for thousands of young children. The Illinois General Assembly is now considering Preschool for All as part of the fiscal year 2007 budget. Every year we wait, thousands of children are left behind. One-third of all children enter kindergarten programs unprepared for school. If we want to close the achievement gap, Preschool for All is a crucial first step. The Governor and General Assembly have worked together to increase early childhood funding by \$90 million the past three years, despite a grim budget environment. As state's financial picture improves, it makes sense to accelerate preschool expansion to serve more children sooner. Given the high costs of school failure, waiting is penny-wise and pound foolish.

Q: Who supports Preschool for All?

A: Early childhood advocates, including teachers, child care providers, parents, and others who care for the well-being of young children. The Preschool for All plan presented by Governor Blagojevich draws from a blueprint created by the bipartisan Illinois Early Learning Council, which was established by the governor and state legislature in 2003. The Council includes representatives from schools, child care providers, Head Start, parents, universities, government agencies, the General Assembly, business, philanthropy, labor and law enforcement. Over 200 people took part in the activities that led to these recommendations. Outreach in support of Preschool for All is coordinated through the Early Learning Illinois campaign convened by Action for Children, Ounce of Prevention Fund, and Voices for Illinois Children, working in collaboration with the Illinois chapter of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids and Chicago Metropolis 2020 and more than 125 other local, regional and statewide organizations throughout Illinois. For more information, visit www.earlylearningillinois.org or contact:

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