High-quality preschool gives kids a strong, early start that prepares them for success in school and in life. Other states including New Jersey, Illinois, North Carolina and Oklahoma have made major commitments to preschool expansion for low-income children or all children in their state. It’s time for California to follow their examples.

Laying a Strong Foundation for Learning

From birth to age 5, a window of opportunity exists to dramatically shape a child’s brain architecture at a time when it is extremely receptive and malleable – laying the foundation for future learning.

- Early education develops skills such as paying attention, showing persistence in finishing tasks, accepting new responsibilities and making friends.
- It provides a language-rich environment that helps children develop early reading skills such as recognizing letters, consonant and vowel sounds.
- About 40 percent of California’s preschoolers are English learners – high-quality pre-k gives them a solid foundation in language that helps promote school success.

Promoting Academic and Economic Success

High-quality preschool is a proven investment in our children, our schools and our communities. It cultivates a skilled workforce that keeps our state competitive in the global economy.

- Students who start school behind tend to stay behind. High-quality pre-k helps close the school readiness gap before it becomes the achievement gap.
- 95 percent of kindergarten teachers say children who attended preschool are better prepared for kindergarten.
- Children who attend high-quality programs are more likely to perform better on standardized reading and math tests and to graduate from high school. They’re less likely to be placed in special education or held back a grade.
- For every dollar, high-quality preschool provides a $7 to $17 return on investment by saving government spending on education, the criminal justice system and public assistance, and increasing tax revenues.

Cecilia, who speaks Cantonese at home, also enjoys the English-language books her preschool class is reading. She wants to be a teacher, and she likes pretending to read the books to her classmates.

Monica reads to her daughter, preschooler Makaela, in Saint Vincent’s library. She also attends parenting classes there on nutrition and dealing with stress.

Flor enjoys reading to other children. Her preschool teacher, Miss Teresa, says she’s a role model.
Investing in the Kids Who Need It Most

The children who could benefit most from high-quality preschool – Latinos, African Americans, English learners and those from low-income families – are the least likely to be in it.

- Only 53 percent of low-income children attend preschool, while 80 percent of children whose families make more than $100,000 attend.
- Even fewer are in high-quality preschools – 13 percent of low-income children are in programs that prepare them for success in school.
- Three quarters of publicly funded preschools in California that responded to a survey have waiting lists.

California must build on its successful models and find ways to increase our investment in high-quality preschool so that within five years we can provide access to high-quality preschool for the kids who need it most.

What are the hallmarks of a high-quality preschool program?

- Teachers are expert, well-trained and have received specialized training in early childhood education, and are professionally compensated with salaries commensurate with their education and experience.
- Curriculum is research-based, developmentally appropriate and sets goals specific to pre-k.
- It builds trusting relationships with families by respecting and supporting cultural diversity and home languages, exchanging information about the child and engaging families in classrooms.

Preschool California is a nonprofit advocacy organization working to increase access to high-quality preschool for all of California's children, starting with those who need it most.

Sources for all research cited in this document are available at www.preschoolcalifornia.org