



## PRE-K OUR WAY

Prepared for school, ready for success.



# RESEARCH AND RESULTS MAKE THE CASE FOR HIGH-QUALITY PRESCHOOL

Research from educators, child developmental experts and economists supports what parents know intuitively—quality early learning opportunities are an essential foundation for success in school and life. Results from New Jersey’s existing preschool programs demonstrate improved success for children in school.

## EARLY LEARNING IS IMPORTANT FOR LATER SUCCESS

Education starts at birth, not at kindergarten. Medical research shows that 90% of physical brain growth occurs by age five, and the time of rapid brain development and opportunity for learning occurs by age five. The quality of adult and child interaction from birth to age five spurs brain development and forms the foundation for the ability to learn, interact with people and apply knowledge. Families play the biggest role in developing these skills, with preschool programs helping parents accelerate learning and socialization to prepare their children for school. Skills developed in early childhood drive a host of adult outcomes including higher education, higher wages, healthier lifestyles, better health, greater productivity and stronger families according to research by Nobel Laureate economist James Heckman.<sup>1</sup>

## QUALITY PRESCHOOL DEVELOPS THE WHOLE CHILD

High-quality preschool programs help parents develop their children physically, emotionally and socially. While children learn the basics of letters and numbers, preschool also focuses on developing the whole child through adult and peer interaction and learning through play. Professional early educators use a child’s natural curiosity to develop skills that will last a lifetime—and they teach parents how to be their child’s best teacher at home.

## PRESCHOOL PAYS OFF FOR CHILDREN

Children who receive quality early childhood education enter kindergarten prepared for school and ready for success. They are less likely to need remediation and special education and more likely to be engaged in school. According to the Advocates for Children of New Jersey, children who have had access to high-quality preschool have shown a 20-40% increase in elementary school test scores and are 40% less likely to stay back a grade than their counterparts who did not have access to preschool.<sup>2</sup>

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## **PRESCHOOL PAYS OFF FOR EVERY CITIZEN**

Parents know that investing in their child’s early education helps them compete in school and seize opportunities later in life. But how do policymakers, educators and taxpayers know that investing in the education of young children will provide significant returns to society? Heckman’s research has shown that every dollar invested in quality early childhood education for children who would otherwise not receive it delivers a 13% per year return on investment through better education, health, social and economic outcomes in addition to the reduced need for social spending.<sup>1</sup>

## **NEW JERSEY’S PRE-K DELIVERS RESULTS**

Children who experience one or two years of New Jersey’s high-quality preschool demonstrate greater proficiencies in language arts and math in the 5th grade than those who didn’t attend an early education program. The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) at Rutgers University found that by 4th or 5th grade, these children are, on average, three quarters of an academic year ahead of students who did not attend a quality preschool and are also less likely to require special education.<sup>3</sup>

## **IT’S TIME FOR PRE-K OUR WAY**

New Jersey recognizes the importance of preschool – and views state-funded, full-day pre-k as a statewide priority. Today fewer than 150 communities benefit from New Jersey’s proven preschool programs for 3- and 4-year-olds. The New Jersey State Legislature adopted a state law in 2008 to expand high-quality preschool programs for all 3- and 4-year-olds from ‘at-risk’ families. However, thousands of 3- and 4-year-olds across approximately 125 communities still wait. This represents a significant loss of potential achievement for thousands of New Jersey preschoolers and a lost opportunity for the state to gain better education, health and economic outcomes. New Jersey’s state-funded, full-day pre-k provides communities with the preschool programs that help prepare our children for success in school and life. And it’s in our power to see that it happens.

### **About Pre-K Our Way**

Pre-K Our Way is a nonpartisan effort to encourage effective, high-quality preschool programs in each of our communities. It brings everyone together to talk about their aspirations for our children—and how quality preschool can prepare each child for success in school and life. Learn more, get involved and find the resources you need to bring high-quality pre-k to our communities. Visit [www.prekourway.org](http://www.prekourway.org).

<sup>1</sup> James Heckman, Jorge Luis García, Duncan Ermini Leaf, and María José Prados, “The Lifecycle Benefits of a Prototypical Early Childhood Program,” National Bureau of Economic Research (2019).

<sup>2</sup> Zalkind, Cecilia. “The ABCs of Preschool: Lessons Learned from New Jersey.” The ABCs of Preschool: Lessons Learned from New Jersey (2013): n. pag. BuildInitiative.org. Advocates for Children of New Jersey, May 2013. Web.

<sup>3</sup> National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), New Brunswick NJ.