

HISPANICS AND EARLY LEARNING: A STRONG FOUNDATION FOR ACHIEVING THE MIDDLE CLASS AMERICAN DREAM



"In states that make it a priority to educate our youngest children...studies show students grow up more likely to read and do math at grade level, graduate high school, hold a job, form more stable families of their own. We know this works. So let's do what works and make sure none of our children start the race of life already behind."

President Barack Obama
State of the Union, February 12, 2013

The foundation of a thriving economy is a strong education system. But millions of children in this country cannot reach the first rung on the ladder of opportunity because they are cut off from quality early learning. While Hispanics are currently the largest minority group in the American public education system, they have the lowest participation in early learning programs. In 2010, only 40 percent of Hispanic children ages three to five years of age are enrolled in a program, and of those enrolled, many are not part of a quality program. The Obama administration is committed to closing this gap through one of the boldest expansions of opportunity in a generation: **access to high-quality preschool for every child.**

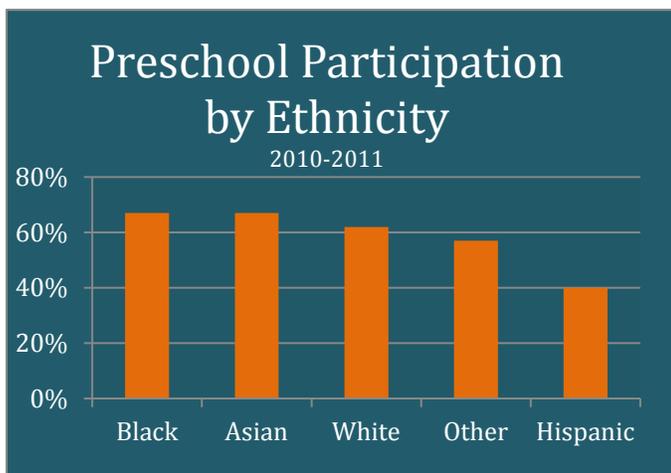


Figure 1 http://hechingerreport.org/content/hispanic-children-not-being-served-by-preschool-programs_2049/

THE NEED

Research shows that children who have effective early learning experiences are better prepared to thrive in school, yet the United States ranks 28th in the world for the enrollment of 4-year-olds in early learning programs. Hispanics number more than 12 million students in America's public schools and make up more than 22 percent of all pre-K-12 public school students. In addition to being a large and growing share of the population, Hispanic children face several unique barriers to school success. For instance, Hispanic children are more likely to live in poverty than their white peers. Hispanic parents also

have the lowest levels of formal education as compared to the parents of other minority children in the United States, a factor that significantly impacts how prepared children are when they enter school. Only 11% of Hispanic children have parents who have attained a bachelor's degree. High levels of poverty and low levels of parental education often result in Hispanic children having fewer resources at home that could shape their early cognitive development. Additional studies reveal that children in middle class and more affluent homes have heard some 30 million more words by age five than children from lower income households. High quality early learning programs are necessary and effective in combating these issues, contributing to the academic and social progress of the Hispanic community.

EARLY LEARNING

Studies have found that early childhood achievement affects success in later grades. Latino children who participated in a high-quality early education program showed dramatic gains in cognitive and language skills, two specific areas that predict strong kindergarten readiness. The benefits of preschool are particularly powerful among children from low-income families who, on average, start kindergarten 12 to 14 months behind their peers in pre-reading and language skills. Achievement test scores suggest that the average Latino child is about two grades behind the average white child by age 9. Overall, Latino children who experienced high-quality early education increased test scores by 54%. Those who participated in full school-day early education programs improved test scores by 73%. Programs that establish high expectations for children's school readiness skills and create an optimal bilingual environment contribute to reducing achievement gaps. For every dollar in high-quality preschool, there is a return of 7 dollars through increased productivity and savings on public assistance and criminal justice. Furthermore, those who participate in early learning programs are 30 percent more likely to graduate from high school. They are also more likely to attend college, find good jobs, and succeed in their jobs as well as be less likely to be involved in crime.

TODAY, 39 STATES AND DC HAVE STATE-FUNDED PRE-KINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS.

BUT FEWER THAN
3 IN 10 FOUR YEAR OLDS
ARE ENROLLED IN A HIGH-QUALITY
PRE-SCHOOL PROGRAM



THE GOAL

Expanding access to high quality early childhood education is among the smartest investments that we can make. The goal is to enable every 4-year-old to attend a quality preschool program—one characterized by well-organized learning experiences, guided exploration, art, and storytelling. In his State of the Union address, President Obama called on Congress to expand access to high-quality preschool to every child in America. As part of its second term agenda, the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics (WHIEEH) has highlighted this effort as a priority for the Hispanic community. The WHIEEH and the President’s Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanics will work to help increase the number of Hispanic 4 year-olds who have access to high-quality preschool programs.

THE PLAN

The President’s **Preschool For All** Initiative proposes to invest **\$75 billion** over 10 years in a new partnership with states that would provide high quality, full-day preschool to all 4-year-olds from families whose incomes are at or below 200 percent of the poverty line. This new partnership would provide incentives for states to cover all low-to moderate-income families who want to send their children to preschool, and to serve families above the income threshold. The U.S. Department of Education (ED) would allocate dollars to states based on their share of four-year olds from low- and moderate-income families and funds would be distributed to local school districts and other partner providers to implement the program. An additional **\$750 million** would be provided for competitive

grants to states to build capacity for implementing high-quality preschool programs. The President’s preschool initiative involves cost-sharing with states, and the costs to the federal government would be fully balanced. States would be eligible for funding under this program if they meet criteria essential for establishing a high-quality preschool program. The federal government would assume a higher share of program costs in the initial years, with states gradually assuming more responsibility over time. States also would receive an infusion of resources to bring their existing programs up to high-quality standards, which include a full-day program, small class sizes and low child-adult ratios.

A CLOSE PARTNERSHIP

This expansion builds on a close partnership between ED and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Recently, the two agencies worked together to unleash state-level innovation through Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge grants, which reward states that raise the bar on quality and provide connections to health, nutrition, mental health, and family support services. ED will collaborate closely with HHS to ensure that the expansion of high-quality preschool services for 4-year-olds is part of a cohesive and well-aligned system of early learning for children, starting from prenatal care, growing the supply of effective early learning opportunities for young children, extending and expanding evidence-based, voluntary home visiting programs and continuing until the start of kindergarten.

To learn more, please visit www.ed.gov or www.whitehouse.gov

