

EARLY LEARNING: ACCESS TO A HIGH QUALITY EARLY LEARNING PROGRAM



"Let the race for the future begin. But let's do everything in our power to ensure that every child in America begins at the same starting line." U.S. Secretary Of Education Arne Duncan, March 19, 2013

The foundation of a thriving middle class is a strong education. 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 the largest minority group in the American public education system today, they still have low degree attainment levels compared to their peers. This administration is committed to closing that unjust gap through one of the boldest expansions of opportunity in a generation: **high-quality preschool for every child.**

THE NEED

Studies prove that children who have rich early learning experiences are better prepared to thrive in school, yet the United States ranks 28th in the world in preschool enrollment, with fewer than three in ten 4-year-olds attending high quality preschool program. Hispanics make up more than 22 percent of all pre-K-12 public school students and are the largest segment of the early childhood population in the nation. However, less than half of Hispanic children are enrolled in any early learning program and for those who do attend, program quality varies widely. Improving high quality early learning programs is more than just a moral and educational imperative; it is smart government: for every dollar spent on high-quality preschool, there is a 7 dollar return through



increased productivity and savings on public assistance and criminal justice. In addition to being a large and growing share of the population, Hispanic children face several

unique barriers to school success. For instance, they 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, a factor that significantly impacts how well prepared children are when they enter school. High levels of poverty and low levels of parental education often mean that many Hispanic children have fewer resources at home that could help shape their early cognitive development. Researchers have found, for example, that Hispanic children have fewer books in the home and read less frequently than white children in similar households. Therefore the achievement gap between high and low-income students is present as early as kindergarten. From a growing number of voices, the call to expand and improve quality early learning in the United States is clear.

STATISTICS

Research proves that early childhood achievement affects later success. By age two, Hispanic children are less likely than their non-Hispanic peers to demonstrate expressive vocabulary skills. Preschool-aged Hispanic children also exhibit lower average scores in language and mathematics knowledge than their non-Hispanic peers. Programs that establish high expectations for children's school readiness skills and create an optimal bilingual environment contribute to reducing achievement gaps. By the time a child is five years old, research shows that 90 percent of his or her brain is fully formed.

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, evidence that the achievement gap begins as early as kindergarten. Studies reveal that children from middle and upper class households have heard some 30 million more words by age five than children from lower income households, and English-proficient Hispanic children are about three months behind white children in pre-reading skills and five months behind in early math skills.

THE GOAL

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, led by a skilled teacher. In addition, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) will work with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to significantly expand and improve services to younger children. The White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics (WHIEEH) works to increase the number of Hispanic children accessing high-quality early learning programs and entering kindergarten prepared for academic and socio-emotional success.

THE PLAN

The Administration has proposed new investments that will establish a continuum of high-quality early learning for children beginning at birth and continuing to age five. The President's proposal includes:

- Providing access to high-quality infant and toddler care through Early Head Start-child care partnerships
- Expanding voluntary evidence-based home visiting to support our country's most vulnerable families
- Developing a new partnership with states to provide voluntary, high-quality, full-day preschool for all 4-year-olds from families at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty line

Key elements of the 2015 budget include:

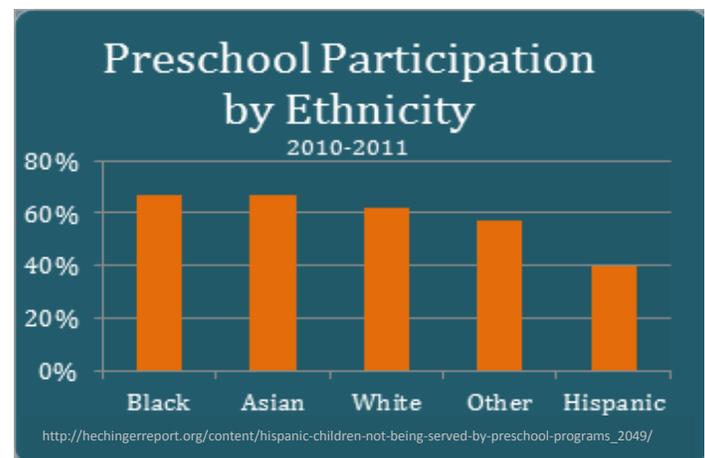
- Preschool for All (\$1.3 billion in mandatory funds, as part of a 10-year, \$75 billion commitment): This new voluntary preschool federal-state partnership will build upon and strengthen existing state systems to provide all low- and moderate-income 4-year-olds with high-quality, publicly-funded preschool. Funded jointly by states and the federal government, the program also will promote access to full-day kindergarten and encourage the expansion of high-quality programs to include children from middle-class families and children under four. It is fully paid for by raising federal tobacco taxes, which also will help to discourage youth smoking and save lives. Preschool for All-eligible states must have high-quality program standards, the ability to link preschool and K-12 data, and early learning and development standards aligned with success in kindergarten.
- Preschool Development Grants: The President is proposing \$500 million—double last year's funding—for

Preschool Development Grants. An additional \$250 million would be provided through the Opportunity, Growth, and Security Initiative. These grants will help states, local education agencies, and local governments build the fundamental components of a high-quality preschool system or expand proven early learning programs. These grants will help states lay the groundwork for the Preschool for All effort.

A CLOSE PARTNERSHIP

ED and HHS have 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 continue cooperating 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, beginning with prenatal care and continuing until the start of kindergarten.

Additionally, the WHIEEH continues to collaborate with organizations towards the mutual goal of increasing Hispanic participation in quality early learning programs across the nation. The President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanics will also build upon their efforts to share with stakeholders the Administration's priorities and inform the efforts of ED and HHS with key information from the Hispanic community.



For more information, visit:

<http://www.ed.gov/early-learning>

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ohs>

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/education/early-childhood>