



# EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Ensure each child in Pennsylvania has the opportunity for affordable and accessible high-quality early childhood education, including infant and toddler child care, as well as pre-kindergarten education. The rapid brain growth during the first few years of life underscores the need to build an early, solid foundation for future success in school, relationships and life. A coordinated care system is also a vital component of the economy, allowing parents to work while knowing their children are receiving high-quality care.

## DATA POINTS

**71%** of Pennsylvania children

under the age of six had all adults in their household in the workforce.

Nearly **102,000** eligible children

do not have access to high-quality pre-k.

More than **45,000** infants and toddlers and nearly

**58,000** preschool children

benefit from early intervention services.

From March 2020 through Labor Day 2020, the minimum financial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic to child care programs was

**\$325 MILLION** statewide.

## POLICY PRIORITIES:

### 1. Increase the number of children enrolled in publicly funded, high-quality pre-k.

- Increase investments for publicly funded, high-quality pre-k so at least 60% of eligible 3- and 4-year-olds can voluntarily participate.
- Ensure an adequate supply of high-quality pre-k providers are eligible for participation in publicly funded programs and preserve the mixed pre-k service delivery system.
- Ensure the availability of a high-quality workforce by reinforcing the need for a pre-k through 4th grade teaching certification.

### 2. Increase the number of Child Care Works eligible children, specifically infants and toddlers, in high-quality child care programs.

- Provide financial support and technical assistance to Keystone STAR 1 and 2 providers to move up the STAR ladder, creating a more financially stable and larger pool of high-quality providers for eligible children in the subsidized child care program.
- Develop a concept of simplifying subsidy payment rates and establishing a base rate which includes the quality level of child care programs.
- Increase base rates for child care providers, coupled with increasing contracted slots to provide more stable payment for high-quality infant and toddler care and allow more infants and toddlers to be served in high-quality.

- d. Support the early childhood care and education infrastructure to ensure the system remains whole in the wake of the COVID-19 public health emergency, including further coordination of services available through the Early Learning Resource Centers (ELRCs).

**3. Investigate policies that support children with developmental delays and disabilities through early intervention programs, while also providing ongoing supports to parents and providers.**

- a. Research a policy framework that focuses on providing necessary services to all young children eligible for early intervention services. Preserve eligibility and high-quality implementation standards for children in programs.
- b. Maximize all state and federal funding.
- c. Ensure equitable access to early intervention services for all children.
- d. Continue to monitor Pennsylvania's progress at conducting developmental screens at recommended intervals and conducting follow-up assessment and care coordination for children identified as having possible delays.
- e. Ensure the continued alignment of academic and social-emotional learning goals found in the Pennsylvania's Learning Standards for Early Childhood with the expectations of decreasing suspension and expulsion in the early learning years.

## LEGISLATIVE OR REGULATORY ACTION NEEDED TO ADVANCE POLICY PRIORITIES:

- Annual federal appropriations including the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Social Services Block Grant (SSBG), Head Start and Preschool Development Grants. State appropriations including Child Care Services and Child Care Assistance lines.
- Advancements of federal policies and legislation expanding and improving Pennsylvania's early learning systems, including additional federal stimulus support and liability coverage for child care providers during the public health emergency.
- Promotion of high-quality incentives for providers within the administration.
- Proposed changes to the Federal Fiscal Year 2022-24 Child Care Development Fund Plan Preprint for States and Territories.

## ACTIONS WE'RE WATCHING:

- Release of the formal evaluation report of Pennsylvania's Pre-K Counts and Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program from the University of North Carolina.
- Continued efforts at federal and state levels to support the child care infrastructure, which was greatly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

