

In June of 2008, the Rhode Island General Assembly passed the *Rhode Island Pre-Kindergarten Act* which directs RIDE to engage in a planning process for a Rhode Island Pre-K Program, including a pilot program and plans for scaling up the program after the pilot stage is completed.

As stated in *The Act*, the general assembly found that attending high quality early childhood education programs helps children develop important social and cognitive skills and knowledge that prepares them to succeed in school. *The Act* also noted that research shows long-lasting benefits for children who participate in very high quality educationally focused early childhood programs. The benefits to children can also generate substantial government savings, including reduced need for special education services, reduced need for cash assistance and other public benefits and reduced rates of incarceration. In fact an analysis by economist Robert Lynch, from the Economic Policy Institute, predicts that:

“A public investment in providing high-quality prekindergarten to all Rhode Island children ages 3 and 4 would start paying for itself by generating cost savings within 9 years. By the year 2050, the ratio of total benefits to total costs would be 8 to 1.”

The Act also notes that there are substantial numbers of children in Rhode Island entering kindergarten who are not adequately prepared to succeed in school which may ultimately contribute to these children dropping out of school, failing to achieve their full potential, becoming dependent on public assistance or becoming involved in criminal activities. By enacting *the Act*, the General Assembly acknowledged the need to adequately prepare all children to succeed in school by providing access to a publicly-funded high quality pre-kindergarten education program. A full copy of the Pre-Kindergarten Act is attached.

The Planning Process

During the Fall of 2008, the Commissioner of the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (RIDE) appointed a Pre-K Planning Group comprised of fifteen (15) people, including some representatives of the original Pre-K Exploration Committee plus a few additional people who also have expertise in early childhood education, to provide feedback and recommendations to RIDE on the components of the Pre-K program in keeping with the required elements set forth in the law. RIDE reviewed the literature and research base and developed a detailed design proposal for feedback and review including, but not limited to, the structure of the pilot and expansion program, teacher compensation strategies, a workforce development plan, funding strategies and an evaluation approach.

The Planning Group has met several times to review the design proposals and develop feedback and recommendations for RIDE to consider in its final design decisions. The Group plans to complete its work by the end of December and the Commissioner is looking forward to receiving the groups detailed recommendations on program design for the pre-k pilot and expansion.

Core Pre-K Program Premises

The core premises for the pre-k program, based on RIDE's recommendations and the *Rhode Island Pre-Kindergarten Act* are as follows:

- Voluntary enrollment. Children will not be required to attend Pre-K.
- Pre-K will be offered in a variety of settings, including child care, Head Start, public schools (this is referred to as a mixed delivery system model).
- Rhode Island's Pre-K program will start with a high-quality, pilot Pre-K project and expand over time.
- The ultimate goal is voluntary universal Pre-K for 3 and 4 year olds, however the program will start with providing pre-k for children in the highest need communities first (with high concentrations of low performing schools).
- Pre-K programs need a consistent and stable funding stream sufficient to meet quality standards. Several states fund pre-K through their state education aid funding formulas.
- Rhode Island's Pre-K program quality standards will meet or exceed National Institute for Early Education Research's Pre-K standards including lead teacher with a BA and specialized training in Early Childhood Education and an assistant teacher with a CDA or equivalent.

Evidence for Pre-K Education

Research has consistently shown that 3- and 4-year-olds who attend a high-quality preschool are more successful in kindergarten and beyond – both academically and socially. Several longitudinal research studies have shown that providing access to high-quality preschool is one of the most cost-effective investments government can make. Momentum is building across the country to improve access to high-quality preschool programs. Many states have launched major pre-kindergarten education initiatives in recent years. Rhode Island is one of only 12 states that has no state-funded pre-kindergarten program.

Participation in preschool education has been steadily increasing during the past decade for young children from middle and upper income families. Nationally, 66% of four year olds and more than 40% of three year olds were enrolled in a preschool education program in 2005. However, enrollment in pre-k remains highly unequal. Many of the children who might benefit the most from pre-k participation do not attend. Families with modest incomes (under \$60,000) have the least access to preschool education.

The following summary of the specific benefits of Pre-K, from the national organization called Pre-K Now (funded by Pew Charitable Trusts) highlights some of the research findings about the positive impact of high quality pre-k.

The Benefits of High-Quality Pre-K

Pre-k benefits children, their families, and their communities. From improved academic outcomes to the economic savings to schools and states, the benefits of high-quality pre-k are irrefutable.

Successful Students

Pre-k increases high school graduation rates.

- ❖ Chicago children who attended a pre-k program were 29 percent more likely to graduate from high school than their peers who did not have pre-k. (Source: Chicago Longitudinal Study)

Pre-k helps children do better on standardized tests.

- ❖ Michigan fourth graders who had attended pre-k passed the state's literacy and math assessment tests at higher rates than their peers who had no pre-k. (Source: "State Efforts to Evaluate the Effects of Pre-Kindergarten", Yale University Child Study Center)

Pre-k reduces grade repetition.

- ❖ Maryland fifth graders who attended pre-k were 44 percent less likely to have repeated a grade than their peers who did not attend pre-k. (Source: "State Efforts to Evaluate the Effects of Pre-Kindergarten", Yale University Child Study Center)

Pre-k reduces the number of children placed in special education.

- ❖ Among Chicago children, those who attended pre-k were 41 percent less likely to require special education services than their peers who did not attend. (Source: Chicago Longitudinal Study)

Responsible Adults

Pre-k reduces crime and delinquency.

- ❖ Chicago children who did not attend pre-k were 70 percent more likely to be arrested for a violent crime by age 18 than their peers who had been pre-k participants. (Source: Chicago Longitudinal Study)

Pre-k lowers rates of teen pregnancy.

- ❖ North Carolina children who attended pre-k were less likely to become teen parents than their peers who did not attend pre-k (26 percent vs. 45 percent). (Source: The Carolina Abecedarian Project)

Pre-k leads to greater employment and higher wages as adults.

- ❖ Forty-year-old adults in Michigan who attended pre-k as children were more likely to be employed and had a 33 percent higher average income than their peers who did not have pre-k. (Source: The High/Scope Perry Preschool Project)

Pre-k contributes to more stable families.

- ❖ Forty-year-old adults in Michigan who attended pre-k as children were more likely to report that they were getting along very well with their families than their peers who did not attend pre-k (75 percent vs. 64 percent). (Source: The High/Scope Perry Preschool Project)

Stronger Communities

Every \$1 invested in high-quality pre-k saves taxpayers up to \$7.

- ❖ Pre-k results in savings by reducing the need for remedial and special education, welfare, and criminal justice services, according to a number of studies. (Sources: "The Economics of Investing in Universal Preschool Education in California", Rand Corporation; The High/Scope Perry Preschool Project)

Pre-k improves efficiency and productivity in the classroom.

- ❖ Children who attended pre-k at Head Start centers had more advanced skills in areas such as following directions, problem-solving, and joining in activities, all of which allow teachers to spend more time working directly with children and less on classroom management. (Source: "The Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey", U.S. Department of Health and Human Services)

The Cost - Benefits of High-Quality Pre-K

The Committee for Economic Development reported¹ in 2006 that investing in Pre-K education has emerged as one of the most promising ways to help strengthen the future economic and fiscal position of our states and nation. Specifically the Committee found the following:

- High-quality preschool programs offer social benefits that far outweigh program costs by improving the later education, employment, earnings and crime outcomes of students who attend. Extending preschool programs to all students could yield \$2 - \$4 in net present value benefits for every dollar invested.
- Expanding access to high-quality preschool programs will improve the fiscal position of states and the nation by reducing education and criminal-justice costs, while boosting income tax revenues.
- Of the fiscal benefits expected from new state investments in preschool, more than 70 percent are attributable to cost savings in crime and K-12 education. For every dollar, spent on preschool, states are projected to recoup 50 – 85 cents in reduced crime costs and 36 – 77 cents in school savings.
- Expanding access to high-quality preschool contributes to long-term economic growth and development for states and the nation. Preschool programs would boost long-term

¹ "The Economic Promise of Investing in High Quality Pre-School", Committee for Economic Development, 2006.

economic growth. Preschool increases the long-run employment level of states by more than twice as much as traditional economic development programs.

Similarly, a RAND report² on the economics of early childhood policy found, based on a review of program evaluations show that early childhood programs can generate government savings that more than repay their costs and produce returns to society that outpace most public and private investments. However, the report also noted that reaping the monetary payoffs of early childhood services is clearly tied to the quality of those services. Features associated with higher quality almost always require more resources. So with no increase in funding, a shift toward higher quality may entail a reduction in services offered. Thus, the fundamental insight of economics in discussing early childhood programs is that there is generally a quality-quantity trade-off in early childhood services unless budget outlays grow.

Next Steps

The Pre-K Planning Group will continue to meet over November and December to further refine the details of the pilot and expansion plan. The group will present its detailed recommendations on program design for the Pre-K pilot and expansion plan to the Commissioner for consideration by RIDE. RIDE will review the recommendations and submit a set of detailed recommendations to the General Assembly in early January 2008.

² "What Does Economics Tell Us About Early Childhood Policy?", RAND, 2008.