




A Path to Success & Protecting Public Safety

Early care & education remain a vital investment in kids' well-being, according to research

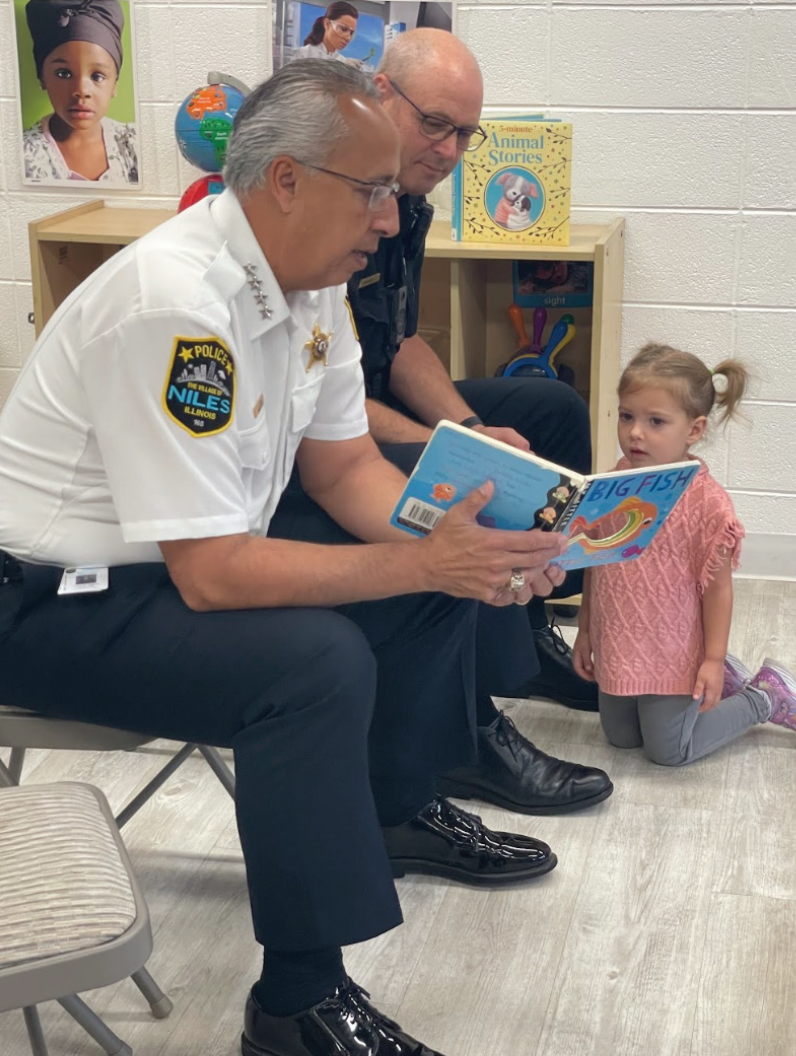
The path we set children upon, in their earliest years, can make a huge difference. Research shows that high-quality early care and education (ECE), from birth through preschool, can result in more successful child outcomes — particularly for children who face substantial challenges in life.

Increased school readiness: A long-term study of more than 1,300 children found that children in higher-quality child care were better prepared for school at age 4 compared to children in lower-quality child care.¹ Boston's pre-K program improved early math, literacy, and language skills among participating children equivalent to seven months of additional learning, compared to children who didn't attend.² In Illinois, an annual teacher survey showed that only 31.5 percent of incoming kindergartners were considered fully ready for school in fall 2024 — but that sobering figure reflected a nearly

 In my experience, the research holds true: When we invest early in children and families, we build stronger communities and prevent problems before they start.”



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eight percentage-point increase from autumn 2018, as the state continues a multiyear push to expand and improve early childhood services.³

Better academic outcomes:

- **Increases in academic proficiency that persist:** New Jersey's state preschool program had positive effects on participants' performance on state assessments of language and literacy, math, and science that were sustained through third grade.⁴ A study of New Mexico's state preschool program found similar results for students' literacy and math performance at third, sixth, and tenth grades.⁵
- **Less special education:** A long-term study found that students participating in

high-quality early learning were more likely to be identified for special education earlier and moved to regular classes sooner.⁶ Children served in the New Jersey state preschool were 7 percent less likely to be placed in special education by tenth grade, compared to children not served.⁷

- **Not held back in school:** By tenth grade, children who had participated in New Jersey's state preschool program had rates of being held back 15 percentage points lower than non-participants.⁸ A study of Tulsa, OK's universal pre-K program found that attendees were significantly less likely to be held back.⁹
- **Fewer dropouts:** The New Mexico state preschool program was associated with a nearly 10 percent increase in high school graduation rates among participants.¹⁰ Students who attended the Tulsa pre-K or Head Start program were eight percentage points more likely to graduate from high school on time, compared to those who didn't attend.¹¹ Research shows that individuals who drop out of high school are more likely to commit crimes, demonstrating the importance of educational attainment for crime prevention.¹² The most recent U.S. Department of Justice Survey of Prison Inmates shows that more than half (57 percent) of federal inmates and nearly two-thirds (62 percent) of state inmates had not completed high school.¹³

Fewer behavior problems: The study of more than 1,300 children cited above found that children in higher-quality child care had significantly lower levels of behavior problems at age 15 compared to children in lower-quality child care.¹⁴ A different study

found that children who were randomly selected to attend a high-quality child care and early education program from ages 2 to 3 had fewer behavior problems than children who were not selected.¹⁵ Participants in another early learning program had fewer discipline referrals in fourth grade, compared to students who didn't participate.¹⁶ Alabama's First Class Pre-K program resulted in enrolled students being about half as likely to have a behavioral infraction in school as those who did not receive pre-K. Further, the differences between the two groups were larger in middle school and high school, when the rates of infractions increased.¹⁷

Less crime: In the renowned Perry Preschool Program, children who attended a high-quality preschool were 35 percent less likely to be chronic offenders by age 27, compared to peers who did not attend.¹⁸ In an evaluation of Chicago's Child-Parent Centers (CPC) program, those who attended were 40 percent less likely to be arrested for a violent crime by age 18.¹⁹ A long-term study of 55 high-poverty counties in North Carolina found that after Head Start was launched, later rates of criminal convictions decreased by 20 percent.²⁰

Less incarceration: A study of the Boston preschool program found that former enrollees were less likely to have been incarcerated in a juvenile facility during high school, compared to non-enrollees.²¹ The evaluation of Chicago's CPC program found that children who attended were less likely to have served time in jail or prison by age 24.²²

Return on investment

The Chicago CPC program had a return of nearly \$11 for every dollar spent, with much of the savings related to participants' reduced



crime by age 26 (at approximately \$5 saved for every dollar invested).²³ An economic analysis of Head Start found that it returns \$2.66 in benefits for every dollar spent. Of the \$17,262 in net benefits per individual served in Head Start, \$5,367 (31 percent) is due to reduced crime.²⁴ In fact, recent research shows that the economic case for investing in preschool is stronger than ever, given its crime prevention impacts. The cost of prison is now higher, prisons are less effective at reducing and preventing crime, and research on programs serving greater numbers of children shows stronger impacts of preschool on crime prevention.²⁵

Conclusion

When we support what works for children, we put them—and our state—on a different, safer path. High-quality child care, Head Start, state preschool, and related early childhood programs are critical to ensuring our kids get the best start possible. We urge Illinois policymakers to invest in early care and education programs as a matter of public safety.

Endnotes

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Fight Crime: Invest in Kids

Police chiefs, sheriffs, and prosecutors protecting public safety by promoting solutions that steer kids away from trouble.

In Illinois, Fight Crime: Invest in Kids operates as part of the Civic Leaders for Illinois Children project (<https://www.ilcivicleaders.org/>).



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