

## **The longterm benefits of preschool education**

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In Yolo County 69 percent of students from low-income families (and 54 percent of all students) are reading below grade level in third grade.

According to First 5 California, "Research shows that students who start off behind tend to stay behind. Meanwhile, those who enter school properly prepared are 10 times more likely to meet state standards on 3rd grade standardized tests."

Children who do not read at grade level by the end of third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school. This is because through third grade children are learning to read; and beginning in fourth grade children read to learn.

This has enormous economic and social implications for our communities.

We believe one way to address and solve this issue is through high quality preschool opportunities for our children. Eighty-five percent of a child's brain development occurs during the first 5 years of life.

Yet, only 14 percent of public education dollars are spent on early childhood education in the United States.

First 5 Yolo research has shown high quality preschool is a significant factor in preparing children for kindergarten.

Teachers utilizing assessment tools are observing a noticeable difference between the kindergarten readiness of children who have attended preschool and those who have not. Kindergarten readiness includes early childhood education in literacy, math, and science as well as practical skills that children need to succeed, and social emotional skills that will help them successfully function in a classroom of peers.

In many cases, the preschool experience also exposes a child to an increased number of words and the vocabulary of a child by age four is one of the best predictors of how that child will perform in school.

Studies show preschool has a durable effect on a child's life skill abilities such as academic motivation and a life-long reduction in negative behaviors. In fact, reducing negative externalizing behaviors in young children has long-term effects in reducing crime, increasing employment, and positive health outcomes.

We now know that every dollar invested in high quality early learning has the potential to save \$7 later through a reduction in students repeating grades or involved in crime. It also has a direct effect on the percentage of students graduating from high school and college, resulting in higher salaries when they enter the work force.

We also know that lack of access to effective preschool has a disproportionate impact on children from low-income families. Low-income children and dual language learners often start behind and stay

behind as they progress through school. Conversely, children who attend quality preschool are 24 percent more likely to pass reading assessments through third grade.

In Yolo County more than 40 percent of three and four-year-olds do not experience preschool before starting kindergarten. Many times this is because affordable space is not available.

The Yolo County Office of Education estimates that each year approximately 2,000 three and four-year-olds who qualify for Head Start and state-subsidized preschool are unable to find placement in these programs due to the long waiting lists. Many more working families are unable to afford private preschools that can cost more than \$800 per month.

We are fortunate in Yolo County to have a universal preschool program, Up 4 West Sacramento (UP4WS), in existence for more than 10 years that has proven results and is nationally recognized as a model for its high quality program. The success of UP4WS could be repeated in other Yolo County communities.

It is amazing what very young children can learn. All children should enter kindergarten on a level playing field with their peers. We urge our communities to begin a dialogue on how to best help our children enter kindergarten ready to learn by providing quality preschool for all.

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