



## **Sample Speech**

### **Why Pre-K is Good for Kids, Schools and Communities**

Until just a few years ago, many people thought of early childhood as a time of fun and innocence, but very little learning.

Now, we know better. Research shows that learning begins at birth – maybe not the kind of learning that we traditionally equate with education, but the absorption of new ideas, nonetheless. In fact, ninety percent of a child’s brain growth occurs before kindergarten.

Early childhood is the time when the brain structures itself into a complex thinking machine. New and stimulating experiences trigger the construction of new connectors between brain cells. Once built, those connectors will carry thought and understanding for a lifetime. This brain architecture is the foundation of learning.

But if this brain architecture is not developed – if the child’s days lack the enriching experiences that spark neural development – then learning in later years becomes problematic. Imagine trying to send an army across a wild river if the engineers hadn’t been there first to build a bridge. It can’t be done, just as a child won’t learn in school if the bridges of thought weren’t built in the preschool years.

The opportunities for learning experiences vary from family to family, and from community to community. Many families create a learning environment at home and have access to quality preschool services. But many other families lack the resources or the knowledge to make learning an everyday part of the child's experiences.

A growing body of research shows that preschool investments are a wise use of public dollars and help reduce paying for the high cost of failure later on. 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.

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.

And 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.

Simply put, children who attend high-quality pre-K enter school more prepared and achieve greater success, including fewer grade retentions, less special education placement, higher standardized test scores and higher graduation rates.

Pre-K helps prevent crime and reduce 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. 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).

Pre-K creates better citizens. As adults, children from quality pre-kindergarten are likelier to be married, with higher educational attainments and better-paying jobs.

Research shows that children who attend high-quality preschool programs will earn \$143,000 more in their lifetimes than those who don't.

Pre-K is a vital part of workforce development, too. Pennsylvania's employers support pre-K investments because they equip young learners with the skills for school success and after graduation, workplace competence.

Every \$1 invested in high-quality pre-K saves taxpayers up to \$17. Pre-K results in savings by reducing the need for remedial and special education, welfare, and criminal justice services, according to the RAND Corporation.

It all adds up to a smart investment in the future of Pennsylvania's children. And it's an investment in the state's ability to compete in an economic climate where survival depends on new ideas and an agile workforce.

The research *clearly* shows that pre-K funding is money well spent – investing in pre-K learning opportunities today creates benefits that last a lifetime.