



PRICHARD COMMITTEE

FOR ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

December 4, 2009

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Greater preschool investments promise big dividends for Kentucky

UK researchers estimate \$5-to-\$1 rate of return

Investing \$1 to make quality preschool available to more Kentucky children would result in benefits of more than \$5 for the state, according to a new report by the University of Kentucky Center for Business and Economic Research (CBER).

The cost-benefit analysis was conducted to determine whether expanding the availability of quality preschool, or pre-k, would be worth the additional cost to the state. The findings were released Friday (December 4, 2009) during a meeting of the Business Leadership Council for Pre-K, a group of business and civic leaders.

The Business Leadership Council is part of Strong Start Kentucky, a coalition of educators, advocates and organizations that is encouraging the state to expand the state's preschool program, created in 1990 as part of the Kentucky Education Reform Act. Currently, public preschool services are available to 3- and 4-year-old children with disabilities and 4-year-olds whose family incomes are 150 percent or less of the federal poverty level (about \$33,000 for a family of four).

The Strong Start coalition, an initiative of the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, advocates making the program available to all 3- and 4-year-old children over time, beginning with those whose family incomes are 200 percent of poverty. Expanding the program would make services available to more than 16,000 additional children at a cost of over \$73 million a year.

“We recognize that the state's fiscal crisis means that new investments might not be possible in the immediate future unless we obtain new revenues,” said Kevin Hable, the council chair. “But we think it is important that our elected officials and policy leaders have information about the strong return on investment that pre-k delivers to make sure those programs aren't cut. These investments should be the top priorities for Kentucky.”

The group will focus on protecting current preschool funding levels during the upcoming legislative session and also will push for legislation requiring schools, community-based programs and Head Start to collaborate on any expansion of preschool, Hable said. That would require communities to use existing programs and resources, along with new funding when it becomes available, to expand preschool while supporting quality child care programs offered by private or nonprofit providers and Head Start.

Supporting the child care programs is important because each year from birth to school age is critical in a child's growth and development, noted Cindy Heine, associate executive director of the Prichard Committee and coordinator of the Strong Start initiative.

The UK study, conducted by Christopher Jepsen, Kenneth Troske and Casey Brasher at CBER, focused on both private benefits – those that would accrue directly to a preschool student and his/her family – and benefits that the public would realize overall as a result of more children participating in preschool.

“A number of findings emerged from this work, but there is one overriding conclusion,” the economists wrote. “When we consider the combined public and private benefits of pre-k, the total estimated benefit is more than \$5 for every \$1 the state would invest in an expanded pre-k program.”

Beyond the financial return on investment, the researchers found that additional benefits from an expanded pre-k program would include:

- Reduced need for special education
- Lower incidence of crime
- Welfare-related savings
- Lower incidence of grade retention
- Lower incidence of child abuse and neglect
- Higher high school graduation and postsecondary enrollment rates for low-income students

The full report is available online at <http://www.prichardcommittee.org>

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