

Quality Matters

HIGH-QUALITY EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION CAN CUT CRIME IN NEW YORK



A Report by FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS New York

Acknowledgements

FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS is a national, bipartisan, nonprofit, anti-crime organization. The organization has a membership of more than 5,000 police chiefs, sheriffs, district attorneys, other law enforcement leaders and violence survivors. The members take a hard-nosed look at what approaches work—and what don't—to prevent crime and violence. They then recommend effective strategies to state and national policymakers.

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Executive Summary



Early care and education programs help kids get the right start in life and avoid future crime, but programs must be high quality to make this difference in kids' lives.

Early Education Cuts Crime: In addition to tough policing, prosecution and corrections, we also need to invest in programs that prevent kids from becoming criminals in the first place. As law enforcement leaders, we know the research shows that early investments in the care and education of young children can make all New Yorkers safer. For example:

- A long-term study of Michigan's Perry Preschool found that at-risk children who did not participate in the high-quality program were five times more likely to be chronic offenders by age 27 than children who did attend.
- At-risk kids left out of Chicago's Child-Parent Centers were 70 percent more likely to be arrested for a violent crime by age 18, according to a study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

High-Quality Programs Get Results: These early care and education programs delivered impressive results because they were high-quality programs. Unfortunately, too many

early care and education programs are not high quality. Past national estimates suggest that only a fraction of child care programs provide high-quality care. Currently, New York has no uniform standards for the different early care and education environments throughout the state and therefore there is no systematic way to ensure that programs are high quality or on their way to becoming high quality.

QUALITYstarsNY Rating System: New York State has an opportunity to improve the quality of early care and education programs by adopting the Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS) known as QUALITYstarsNY. This system encourages early care and education program providers to participate in a voluntary review process based on a number of quality indicators used to rate the program. The rating system aims to:

- Monitor the quality of early care and education programs;
- Help parents find programs rated as high quality; and
- Provide technical assistance and incentives to improve program quality.

Research from other states shows this can work. To make sure more New York children receive high-quality care and education in their early years — the help they need to succeed in life and avoid later crime and violence — we call on state policy-makers to enact this promising system for improving quality in early care and education programs across the state.

Introduction

The law enforcement leaders of FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS are determined to see that dangerous criminals are put behind bars. But those on the front lines in the fight against crime know that America's anti-crime arsenal contains no weapons more powerful than proven programs that keep kids from committing crimes in the first place. High-quality early care and education helps kids get the right start in life.

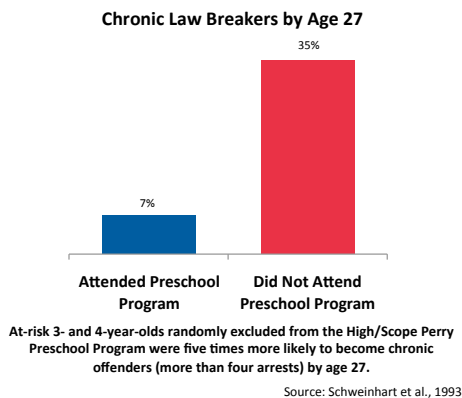
The first years of life are a critically important time in children's development. During this period, children's environments and relationships with the adults around them – first and foremost their parents – are vital to healthy development.¹ But for a majority of young children today, early care and education programs are a part of their daily experience. Sixty-three percent of U. S. children under 5 attend early care and education programs on a regular basis.² The experiences children have in child care or pre-kindergarten, and the relationships with adults there, have an important influence on their young lives. Early care and education programs need to be high in quality to ensure that their influence on young children is a positive one.

High-Quality Early Care and Education Cuts Crime

Research has demonstrated the crime reduction effects of high-quality early care and education. Consider the evidence:

High/Scope Perry Preschool: The Perry Preschool Program is a high-quality, one- to two-year-long educational program with a home visiting component that is considered a model for early

High-quality early education cuts future crime

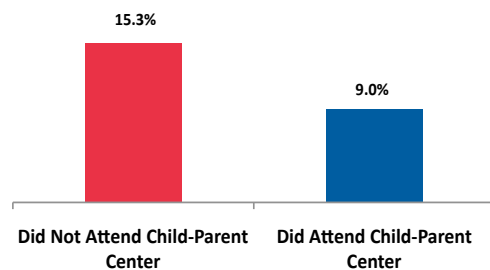


childhood education programs. The High/Scope Educational Research Foundation initiated a study of the Perry Preschool Program in Ypsilanti, Michigan in 1962. The Foundation randomly assigned one half of a population of at-risk, low-income 3- and 4-year-olds to attend the Perry Preschool Program and assigned the other half to a control group not receiving preschool. In 2004, the Foundation released the most recent findings of lifetime effects of the Perry Preschool Program.

By age 27, children who did not attend the program were five times more likely to become chronic offenders with five or more arrests.³ By age 40, those who did not attend the program were 50 percent more likely to become chronic offenders with more than 10 arrests and 50 percent more likely to be arrested for violent crimes. Children left out of the program were four times more likely to be arrested for drug felonies by age 40, and seven times more likely to be arrested for possession of dangerous drugs.⁴

70% more likely to be arrested for a violent crime by age 18

An Arrest for Violence by Age 18



Source: Reynolds 2001

Chicago Child-Parent Centers: Chicago's federally funded Child-Parent Centers have served more than 100,000 3- and 4-year-olds since 1967. The program is a center-based early intervention program that provides educational and family services to economically disadvantaged children. A study comparing 989 children in the Child-Parent Centers to 550 similar children who were not in the program showed that children who did not participate in the program were 70 percent more likely to be arrested for a violent crime by age 18.⁵ Furthermore, between the ages of 18 and 24, individuals who did not participate in the program were 39 percent

Fast Facts on Early Care and Education in New York State

- There are over 1.2 million children under age 5 in New York State.⁸
- Over 870,000 children under age 6 in New York have all parents (one parent in single-parent families, and both in two-parent families) in the workforce. Most of these children spend time in some form of non-parental child care each week, in child care centers, family child care homes, with nannies or in preschool programs.⁹
- New York State currently has no uniform standards across early care and education program environments to ensure that all programs across the state are evaluated in the same way.¹⁰

QUALITYstarsNY would ensure that the state has the same quality expectations for all early care and education programs regardless of their setting.

more likely to have been convicted of a violent crime and 24 percent more likely to have been incarcerated in jail or prison.⁶ This program will have prevented an estimated 33,000 crimes by the time the children who have attended the program thus far reach the age of 18.⁷

The research is clear: high-quality preschool programs can reduce crime.

High-Quality Early Care and Education Programs Help Children Succeed

In addition to crime prevention, high-quality early care and education programs also lead to better educational performance. In a national poll of kindergarten teachers, nine out of ten teachers agreed that substantially more children would succeed in school if all families had access to quality pre-k programs.¹¹

Research shows that high-quality pre-k programs have positive effects on children's school readiness, helping at-risk or disadvantaged children start school ready to learn and succeed academically in later school years.¹²

- In a recent study of Oklahoma's state pre-k program, children's overall test scores increased by 16 percent when they participated in the high-quality program for one year. Hispanic students made the most impressive gains, achieving a 54 percent increase in test scores. Children from low-income families also made significant gains, including a 31 percent increase in general knowledge and an 18 percent improvement in language skills.¹³
- Compared to children who did not attend the Perry Preschool Program, by age 40, those who did attend the program were 44 percent more likely to graduate from high school.¹⁴ Children who were *not* enrolled in the Perry Preschool Program were also twice as likely to be placed in special education classes.¹⁵
- Finally, the Chicago Child-Parent Center program, children who attended the program were 29 percent more likely to graduate from high school. In contrast, children who were *not* in the Chicago Child-Parent Center program were 67 percent more likely to be held back in school and 71 percent more likely to be placed in special education classes.¹⁶

Only High-Quality Programs Deliver Solid Results

Only high-quality early care and education programs have been found to significantly reduce crime and enhance school success. Researchers have found that high-quality early care and education programs have several key characteristics, including:

- Highly skilled teachers with appropriate compensation;¹⁷
- Comprehensive and age-appropriate curricula;¹⁸
- Strong family involvement;¹⁹
- Small staff-to-child ratios to ensure each child gets sufficient attention;²⁰
- Small, age-appropriate class sizes;²¹ and
- Screening and referral services for developmental, health or behavior problems.²²

A recent analysis of early education programs in 11 states confirms that programs must be higher in quality in order to produce positive effects on children's school readiness skills. When pre-k teachers provided a high-quality classroom experience by being more responsive and sensitive, children showed better social adjustment and fewer behavior problems than did children in moderate- or low-quality classrooms.²³ And when pre-k teachers provided moderate- to high-quality instruction in their classrooms, children showed more advanced academic and language skills than children in low-quality classrooms.²⁴

Many Child Care Options are Not High-Quality

While high-quality early care and education can markedly reduce the risk of school failure and other negative outcomes, low-quality care actually leads to increased risk of such results.²⁵ Unfortunately, much of the child care America's children are receiving is substandard. More current data are not available, but estimates from the 1990s indicated that the proportion of child care settings providing good- to high-quality care was small, ranging from nine percent to 14 percent.²⁶ A lack of comprehensive program quality standards and a lack of national or state data on quality means that the



current levels of quality are unknown, but are likely to still be fairly low.

Research shows that children in low-quality early care and education settings do not benefit from these programs. A study of pre-k programs in 11 states found that children in low-quality classrooms did not show any gains in academic skills or reductions in behavior problems.²⁷ Other studies have found that children in lower-quality care were more likely to display behavior problems.²⁸

And even more troubling, recent research shows that young children can be harmed by low-quality care. For example, a study of children in home-based child care in one metropolitan area in another state found that 40 percent of the children showed high stress levels that were potentially harmful while at child care. Researchers found that these elevated stress levels were associated with being in lower-quality care, characterized by harsh and inconsistent treatment by their caregivers.²⁹ When these children were studied again 6 months later, the children with high levels of stress showed more fear and anxiety in their child care setting, as well as signs of sadness, anxiety and withdrawal.³⁰ Based on research on children with depressed mothers, evidence suggests that children who receive low-quality caregiving and experience chronic stress are more likely to develop problem behaviors later on.³¹ Children displaying serious problem behaviors early in life have a greater likelihood of delinquency, with an increased risk of future crime as adults. Criminologists Loeber and Farrington note that from one-fourth to one-third of disruptive children are at risk of becoming delinquent as older children, and about one-third of all delinquent children later become serious, violent and chronic offenders.³²

From a law enforcement perspective, the early care and education quality crisis is especially severe because it strikes hardest at those most vulnerable—at-risk children. When we shortchange the quality of their care, we increase the risk they will grow up to pose a threat to the rest of us.

Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS)

Ensuring that all New York’s young children have access to high-quality early care and education is essential to help children succeed in school and avoid lives of crime. Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) are a promising approach for New York to enhance the quality of early care and education programs. A QRIS provides a rating of the quality of an early care and education program.

Quality Rating and Improvement Systems are characterized by five key features:

1. use of early care and education program quality standards as a basis for rating programs;
2. a system for monitoring the quality of programs;
3. the dissemination of information about the quality of programs to parents and the public;
4. a process to support programs in improving their quality, including providing technical assistance and making training available to providers; and
5. the provision of financial incentives to providers to improve their program quality.³³

Currently, 23 states have implemented a statewide QRIS, many others are developing theirs and a number of evaluation studies have been conducted or are underway.³⁴ Separate evaluations of four different state or local rating systems (in Oklahoma; Pennsylvania; Palm Beach, Florida; and Indiana) have shown that a QRIS can improve the quality of rated early childhood education programs.³⁵ These studies found that early care programs participating in the QRIS improved their quality over time.

An evaluation of Missouri’s Quality Rating and Improvement System found that:

- Low-quality programs had a negative impact on children’s social and emotional skills; and
- Children in poverty who attended high-quality programs made significant gains in literacy skills and social and emotional development.

Only two states, Colorado and Missouri, to date have measured the effects of QRIS on children’s outcomes.

Colorado’s evaluation was flawed in several important ways, making its results inconclusive.³⁶ Missouri’s evaluation, however, found significant impacts on children as a result of child care providers’ participation in the rating system.³⁷ Missouri’s QRIS evaluation found that children in high-quality programs (rated as 4- or 5-star programs) showed significantly greater gains than children in low-quality programs (rated as 1- or 2-star programs). Children in high-quality programs showed significant increases in social and behavioral skills over one academic year, a six percent increase, while children in low-quality programs actually experienced decreases in their social and behavioral skills, a decline of four percent.³⁸

The children in poverty participating in Missouri’s QRIS who were in higher-quality programs had significantly greater gains in social and behavioral skills, motivation and vocabulary than the poor children in lower-quality programs. With respect to vocabulary, poor children in high-quality programs had increased their vocabulary scores by six percent over the academic year, whereas poor children in low-quality programs experienced decreased vocabulary scores, by three percent, over the academic year.³⁹

QUALITYstarsNY: Improving Quality and Providing Accountability for Investments in Early Care and Education.

New York State is developing its own Quality Rating and Improvement System, QUALITYstarsNY, to improve the quality of early care and education programs. In 2009, New York began field-testing its new QUALITYstarsNY system in over 230 sites in 13 municipalities across the state. The field test is now complete and a report will be issued in April 2011. This project is now ready to go to its next phase of implementation.

Once implemented, QUALITYstarsNY would be a statewide QRIS, and all early care and education programs regulated by a public agency would be eligible to apply. This includes child care centers, family child care homes, school-age child care programs, Head Start and the state's Universal Pre-K programs. The rated programs would receive from one to five stars based on a points system in four categories. Programs would earn a maximum of 100 points across four areas:

- learning environment (25 points);
- family engagement (15 points);
- teacher qualifications and experience (35 points); and
- leadership and management (25 points).

The inclusion of family engagement as one of the four areas by which program quality is assessed is essential. Studies of early childhood programs which have obtained crime prevention results show the importance of parent coaching for at-risk families to help children stay on track and avoid future crime.⁴⁰

Parent coaching is typically a more intensive service than family engagement; inclusion of parent coaching within the family engagement area would enhance the crime prevention potential of QUALITYstarsNY.

By providing a system of accountability that measures quality and

“Early education isn’t about just getting kids into any kind of program. It has to be high quality for the investment to pay off. If we provide at-risk kids with opportunities to participate in high-quality pre-k programs, we will significantly reduce later crime.”

Chief John Tedesco
Troy, New York

provides financial rewards for achieving higher quality, QRIS systems create market incentives for early care and education programs to improve their quality. This encourages programs to seek out or provide continuing education training to their own higher-skilled teachers. In these cash-strapped times, QUALITYstarsNY is the most promising tool available to promote the improvement of early care and education programs across the state.

New York State is making investments in early care and education and we need to make sure that New York's citizens are getting the return on that investment. The only way to do that is to invest in high-quality programs. The only way to ensure that programs are high quality is to have accountability, like that provided through a QRIS system.

“...it is a natural reaction to cut spending when faced with a budget deficit. Make no mistake, reducing spending in some areas is necessary and warranted. However, when one has dug themselves into a hole, the solution is not to stop digging as much as to start digging the hand and toe holds that facilitate climbing out. Investing in early childhood education is that hand and toe hold.”

- Prof. James Heckman,
Nobel Prize-winning economist

Evidence-Based Teacher Training

One important arena for improving the quality of early care and education programs is through teachers. Ensuring that early education teachers are skilled and sensitive is a key component of providing high-quality programs.

In the last decade, more research has emerged on evidence-based approaches for teacher training. For example, Robert Pianta and colleagues have developed well-researched and validated observational training systems for teachers.⁴⁵ This approach uses the CLASS

(Classroom Assessment Scoring System), an observational measure of teacher-student interactions, along with MyTeachingPartner, a web-based resource which is used to provide feedback and consultation to teachers.⁴⁶ This training approach uses standardized methods to observe and assess teachers' interactions with students, and provides feedback to teachers to help them modify and improve their teaching practices.

High-Quality Early Education Saves Money

High-quality early care and education investments can provide an excellent return on investment for all New Yorkers.

High/Scope Perry Preschool: The Perry Preschool Program cut crime, welfare and other costs so much that it saved the public more than \$16 for every \$1 invested (including more than \$11 in crime savings).⁴¹

Chicago Child-Parent Centers: The Chicago Child-Parent Centers program produced over \$10 in benefits to the public for every dollar expended.⁴²

The monetary savings generated by the program from just the 100,000 children served in Chicago add up to \$3.7 billion.⁴³ In addition to these monetary savings, there are the immeasurable benefits from reducing victims' pain and suffering that result from reduced crime.

Many leading economists, such as Arthur Rolnick, Senior Vice President and Director of Research at the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, and James Heckman, Nobel Prize-winning economist, point out that funding high-quality early education is one of the best investments government can make.⁴⁴

Conclusion

More than 300 police chiefs, sheriffs, district attorneys and violence survivors who are members of FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS *NEW YORK* recognize that among the most powerful weapons to prevent crime and violence are high-quality early care and education programs that help kids get the right start in life.

Research confirms what law enforcement professionals know from experience: getting the right start in life is crucial. Studies show that being enrolled in a high-quality early care and education program greatly reduces the likelihood that at-risk kids will engage in criminal behavior as adults.

Even in tough economic times—especially in tough economic times—this investment in improving the quality and accountability of New York's early care and education programs is critical. The *only* way we are going to get the return on our early education investment is if we make sure that we are investing in quality programs. New York has taken good initial steps in developing and field testing its QUALITYstarsNY program to help improve early care and education program quality across the state. It is time to take the next step and start implementing this system statewide.

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