

# Quality Pre-Kindergarten is a Powerful Public Health Initiative for New York's Children



Investing in quality early learning programs is truly a powerful health initiative, not only because of its enduring effects on individual health, but because of its extensive impact on public health and public safety. Early care and education provides the opportunity to address the roots and earliest influences on health behaviors. It has the potential to generate direct, immediate, and lasting benefits.

Participation in quality pre-kindergarten has a documented impact on **nine out of ten** leading health indicators, as defined by *Healthy People 2010*:

- Physical activity
- Substance abuse
- Injury and violence
- Overweight and obesity
- Responsible sexual behavior
- Immunization
- Tobacco use
- Mental health
- Access to health care

*Early learning settings may be some of the most effective and most important venues through which our nation's health is transformed*

## Making the Case for Early Care and Education: What We Know

A growing body of rigorous, longitudinal research has produced some key findings linking early education, including prekindergarten, to long-term, positive changes in health behavior:

### Evidence Based Health Behavior Impact of Quality Early Learning Programs

#### High/Scope Perry Preschool Study

- Less likely to become smokers
- Less likely to engage in risky behaviors
- Less likely to use/abuse illicit drugs
- Less likely to engage in violent behavior
- More likely to be employed and earn higher wages
- More likely to wear seat belts

#### Chicago Child-Parent Centers Study

- Lower rates of child maltreatment
- Lower rates of depression
- More likely to have health insurance
- Lower rates of teen pregnancy
- Lower rates of felony arrests and incarceration

#### The Abecedarian Study

- Lower rates of cigarette smoking
- Lower rates of teen pregnancy
- Lower rates of marijuana use

#### Brookline Early Education Project

- More likely to have health insurance
- More likely to have a regular source of health care
- More likely to visit a doctor or dentist annually
- More likely to report a health rating of good or excellent
- Lower rates of depression



A Nationwide Network of Doctors  
Advocating for Young Children

Docs For Tots 1000 Vermont Ave. NW, Suite 700, Washington, DC 20005  
202.589.0103 • Fax: 202.289.0776 • dft@docsfortots.org • www.DocsForTots.org



## Policy Recommendations for New York

**Ensure Quality Full Day Pre-K Programs available to all 3 and 4 year olds.** Research supports that quality, full-day programs lead to enhanced opportunities for young children and an increased capacity to realize the benefits of early learning investments. It is through expanding access to full -day, quality Pre-K programs to all 3 and 4 year olds in New York that public health outcomes can be most effectively realized.

**Expand standards and investments in health promotion and prevention opportunities within early learning settings to support child health and well-being.** Healthy children learn best and quality early learning settings offer fertile ground for myriad opportunities to positively impact health in both the short- and long-term. This expansion and investment should include mental health consultation, developmental and other screenings, health advisory committees, expansions of health consultant funding and roles, health education programs (including health literacy) and a developed referral process. Best practices in collaborations between health and education should be identified and disseminated.

**Create a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) as the new framework for excellence in early childhood programs and a vehicle to drive strategic investments in early education and care.**

The new QRIS system will establish standards of program excellence, serve as a consumer/parent education tool and create a system for prioritizing and deploying resources in a way that assures quality, promotes best practices, and develops and supports a qualified workforce. Once established, New York should strategically invest in helping programs meet QRIS measures. The state should dedicate investments and make technical assistance available to ensure quality.

**Launch the Excellence in Early Childhood Workforce Initiative.**

to invest in workforce development as the state works to create the longer-term policy directions to support and expand the qualified workforce. New investments should target loan forgiveness, scholarship, mentoring and reward bonuses, equitable compensation, and professional pathways to facilitate provider regulation.