

Pre-K for All

TEAM
KENTUCKY.®

Testimony – Budget Review Subcommittee
Primary and Secondary Education

Kentucky's Preschool Program

Kentucky's Preschool Timeline

1990

Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) establishes state-funded preschool

2007

The General Assembly increases the eligibility for 4-year-olds from 130% of the federal poverty level to 150%.
Passes the House 98-2.
Passes the Senate unanimously.

2016

Increase to 200% eligibility line-item vetoed

1992

All school districts offer preschool to 4-year-olds under 130% of the federal poverty level

2016

The General Assembly votes to increase the eligibility for 4-year-olds from 150% of the federal poverty level to 200%

2016

Eligibility for 4-year-olds is increased from 150% of the federal poverty level to 160%

2016: General Assembly Expands Preschool Access

2016-2018 Executive Branch Budget

“a child shall be considered **eligible for enrollment in the preschool program** if he or she is a resident of the school district, has reached the age of four by August 1 of the school year, and **his or her family income is less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level.**”

(p. 51-52)



Passed

House: 98 – 1

Senate: 38 – 0



Vetoed

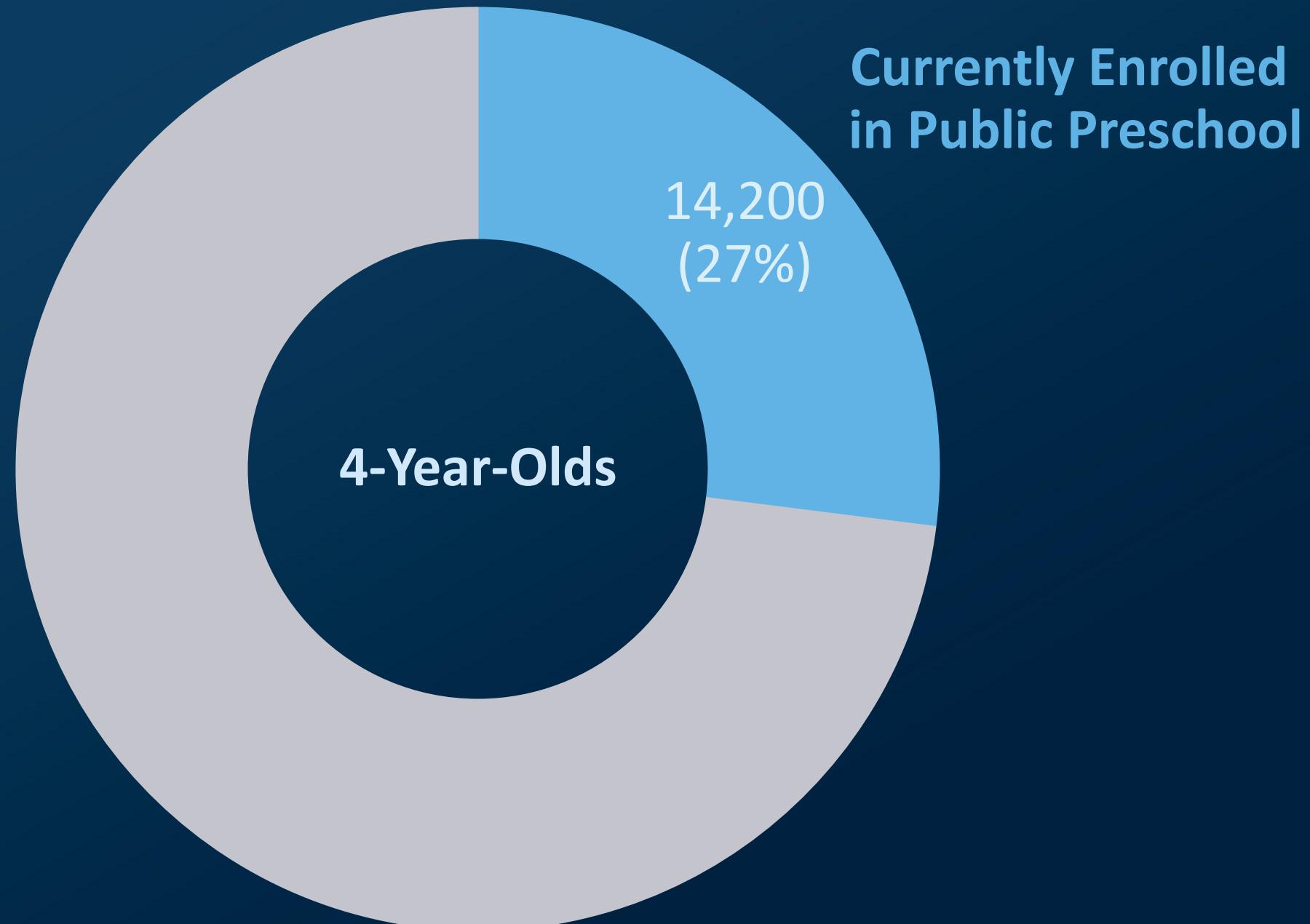
Kentucky's Current Preschool Investment

General Assembly Appropriations to Public Preschool, by Fiscal Biennium



Current Kentucky Preschool Enrollment

54,000
4-Year-Olds in Kentucky



Budget Proposal

Key Milestones and Activities

Biennium 1 (2026-2028)

Year 1 ('26-'27)

Year 2 ('27-'28)

Phase 1

- a. KDE Regulations*
- b. District Planning*

Phase 2

*Implementation
Plan Submission*

Phase 3

*Funding Application
and Launch*

Budget Request

Per-pupil Recurring Funding



One-time Startup Funding

\$4,022 per Child

\$10 Million

Total General Fund
Appropriation Necessary for
Expansion

Exact dollar figure is dependent on time-to-scale

Incremental Budget Appropriation

Incremental Budget Appropriation, Up to 250% FPG in the '26-'28 Biennium

■ One-time Funding ■ Funding for New Seats ■ Budget from Prior Year ■ Public Preschool Funding



Funding Sources

Funding Sources



Beginning July 1, 2026, funds from the **\$115 million in Sports Wagering and Lottery Corp. revenues** can support program startup and initial operations.



Remaining funds for Pre-K for All can be set aside from this fund.



After June 30, 2028, the Pre-K for All may receive funding from **General Assembly appropriations, contributions, gifts, or grants**.

We Know Preschool Works, Kentucky Needs More

“FRPL and IEP students enrolled in a **state-funded preschool program performed better than their counterparts from any other single prior setting** except for [private] child care.” (p. 85)

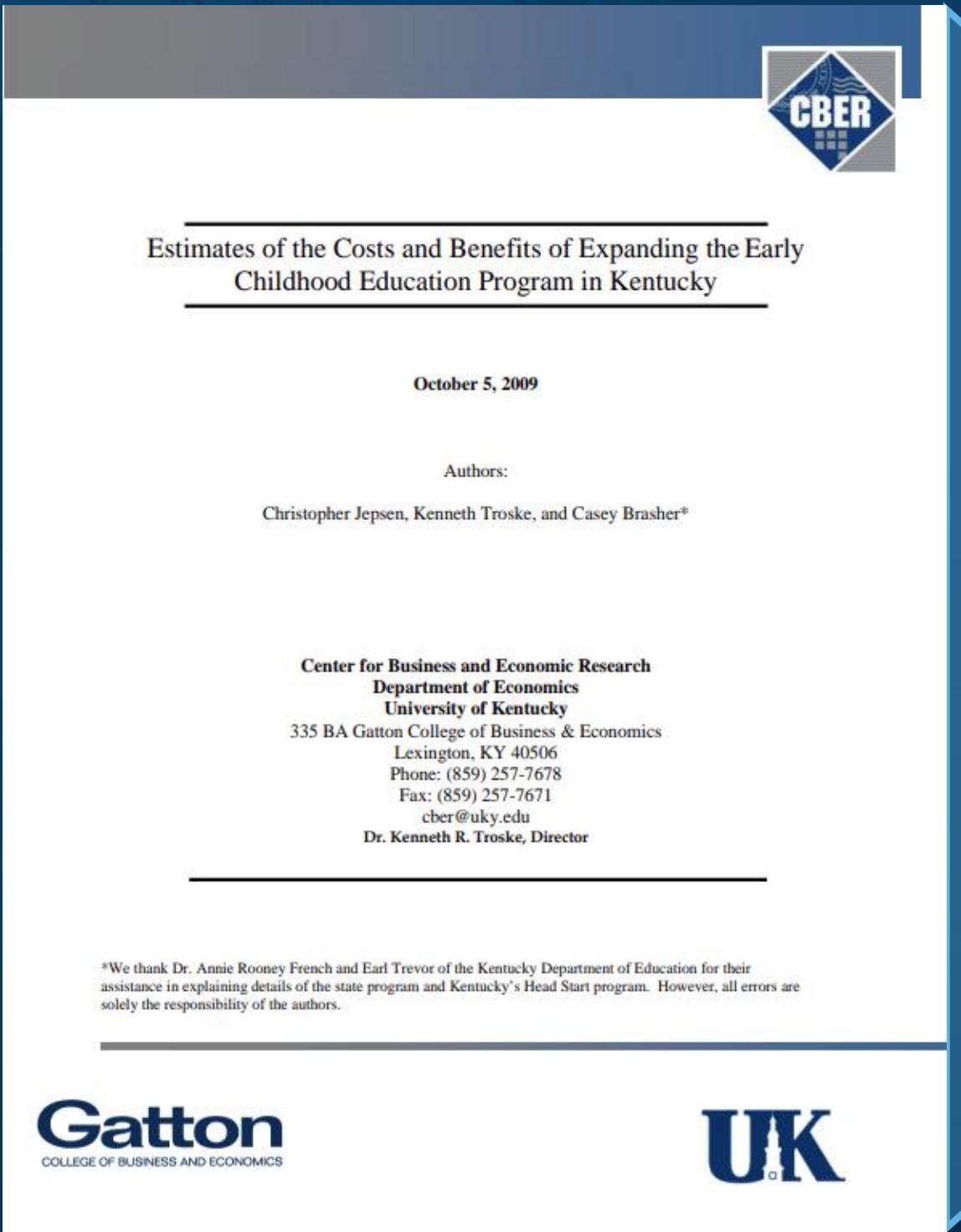


Preschool Program Review
And Full-Day Kindergarten

Research Report No. 450

Office Of Education Accountability

Pre-K Expansion has a High Return on investment



CBER

Estimates of the Costs and Benefits of Expanding the Early Childhood Education Program in Kentucky

October 5, 2009

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*We thank Dr. Annie Rooney French and Earl Trevor of the Kentucky Department of Education for their assistance in explaining details of the state program and Kentucky's Head Start program. However, all errors are solely the responsibility of the authors.

Gatton
COLLEGE OF BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS

UK

“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.”

Pre-K for All Helps Business



“We must invest in high-quality early childhood programs to better prepare our children for success in life. . . . To do this, we must: (1) Give more at-risk children access to high-quality preschool services that are staffed by providers who have high-quality professional learning opportunities, technical assistance and support. (2) Coordinate resources and practices among all public and private early childhood providers and school districts. (3) Ensure quality evaluation of early childhood programs.”

Advisory Committee members



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Secretary, Education
and Labor Cabinet



Robbie Fletcher
Commissioner,
Kentucky Department
of Education



Dr. Felicia Cumings Smith
Chair, Prichard Committee
for Academic Excellence



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Chair, Kentucky
Chamber of Commerce



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Former House
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R. Travis Brenda
Former State Representative
(R), 71st House District
(2019-2021)



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Laura White-Brown
Mayor, City of
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Carrie Ballinger
Superintendent,
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Schools



Maddie Shepard
President, Jefferson County
Teachers Association



Joel Wolford
President, Kentucky
Education Association



Jeni Ward
Secretary/Treasurer,
Kentucky United 120
American Federation
of Teachers

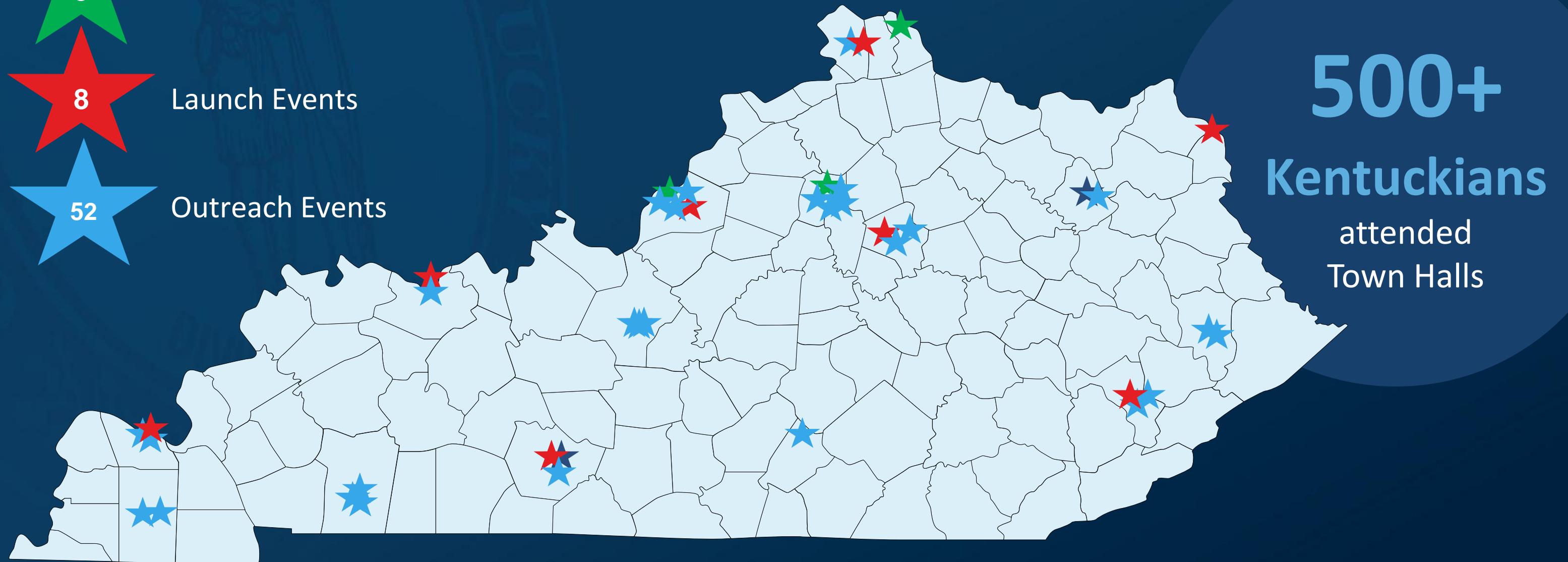


Rudy Spencer
Parent / Managing Director,
Blue Sky Foundation, Inc.



Jamie Rodgers
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Kentuckians Spoke, the Committee Listened



Findings

Finding 1: Kentucky's Early Care System is Fragmented



Kentucky delivers early care and education through a **patchwork of programs** with inconsistent eligibility rules, funding sources, affordability, and access – **creating gaps that affect families** across the state.

Finding 2: Kentucky's Existing System is Inadequate

Child care is often **unaffordable and inaccessible...**



Not all kids get to attend



Forcing parents out of the workforce



Leaving half unprepared for Kindergarten

Finding 3: Pre-K for All is Achievable



Several states have successfully expanded access to preschool for all 4-year-olds – proving that **Pre-K for All is not only possible, but already working**

Finding 4: Successful Pre-K for All Programs Focus on Quality

Successful state programs...



Prioritize quality



Offer **flexible mixed delivery**



Use **strong data systems** to improve outcomes and guide decisions

Finding 5: Pre-K Pays Off for Kids, Families, and Communities

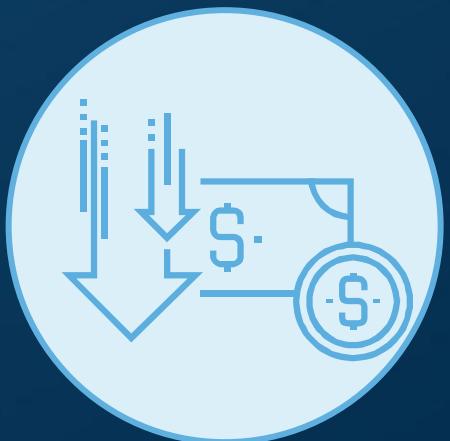
High-quality Pre-K...



Boosts
Kindergarten
readiness



Strengthens long-term academic success



Lower child care costs

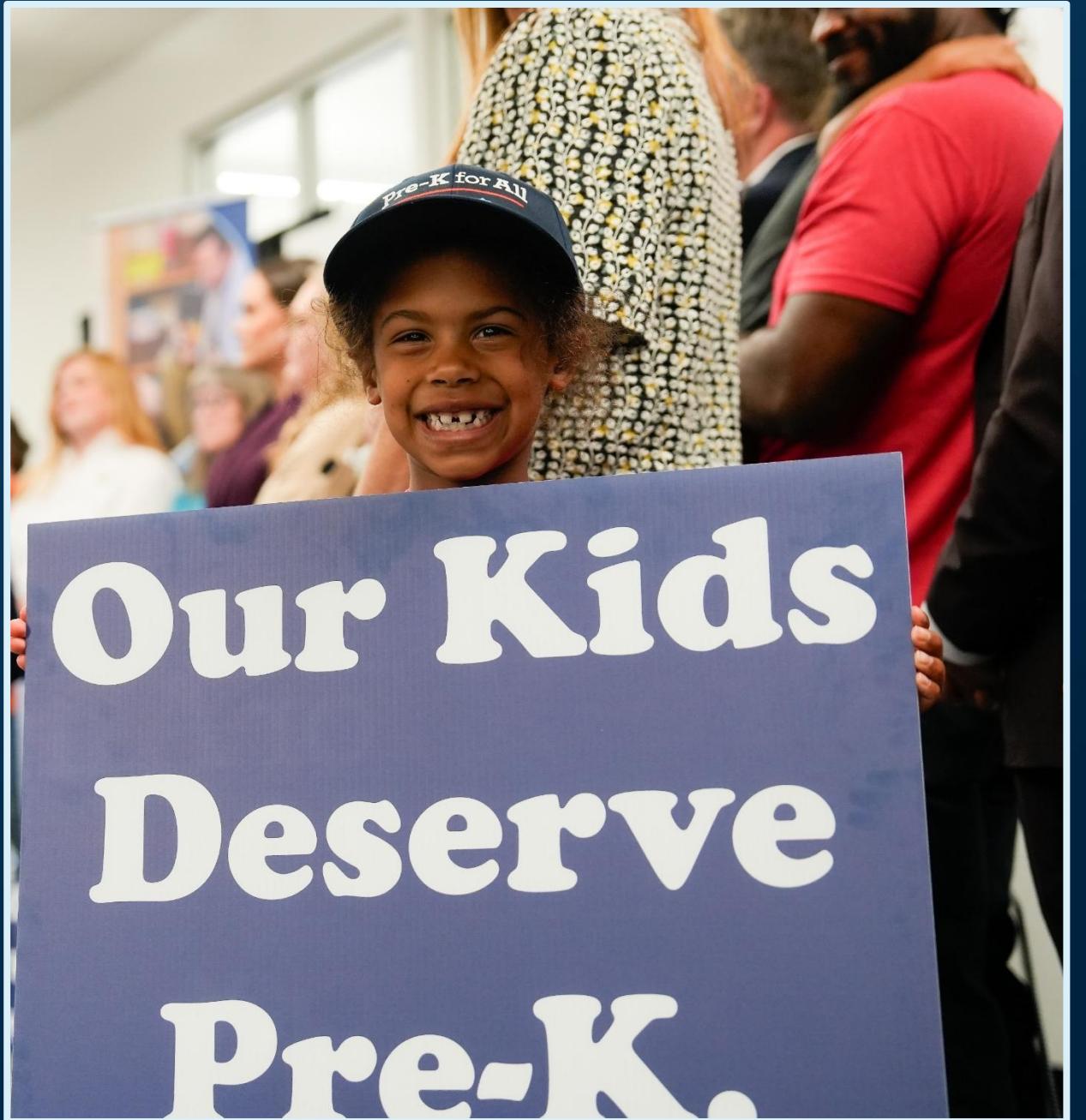


Delivers strong economic returns

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Expansion

Expand its existing, state-funded public preschool program *now*



Recommendation 2: Responsible Growth



Expand *responsibly*, in phases over several years

Recommendation 3: Local Flexibility

Ensure *local*
flexibility in
preschool expansion



Recommendation: Partner in Service



Provide *services through* mixed and integrated school district-level *partnerships* with Head Start, Private Regulated Child Care, and other community-based providers

Recommendation 5: Emphasize Quality

Prioritize *quality* and *flexibility* in implementation



Recommendation 6: Regulatory Flexibility



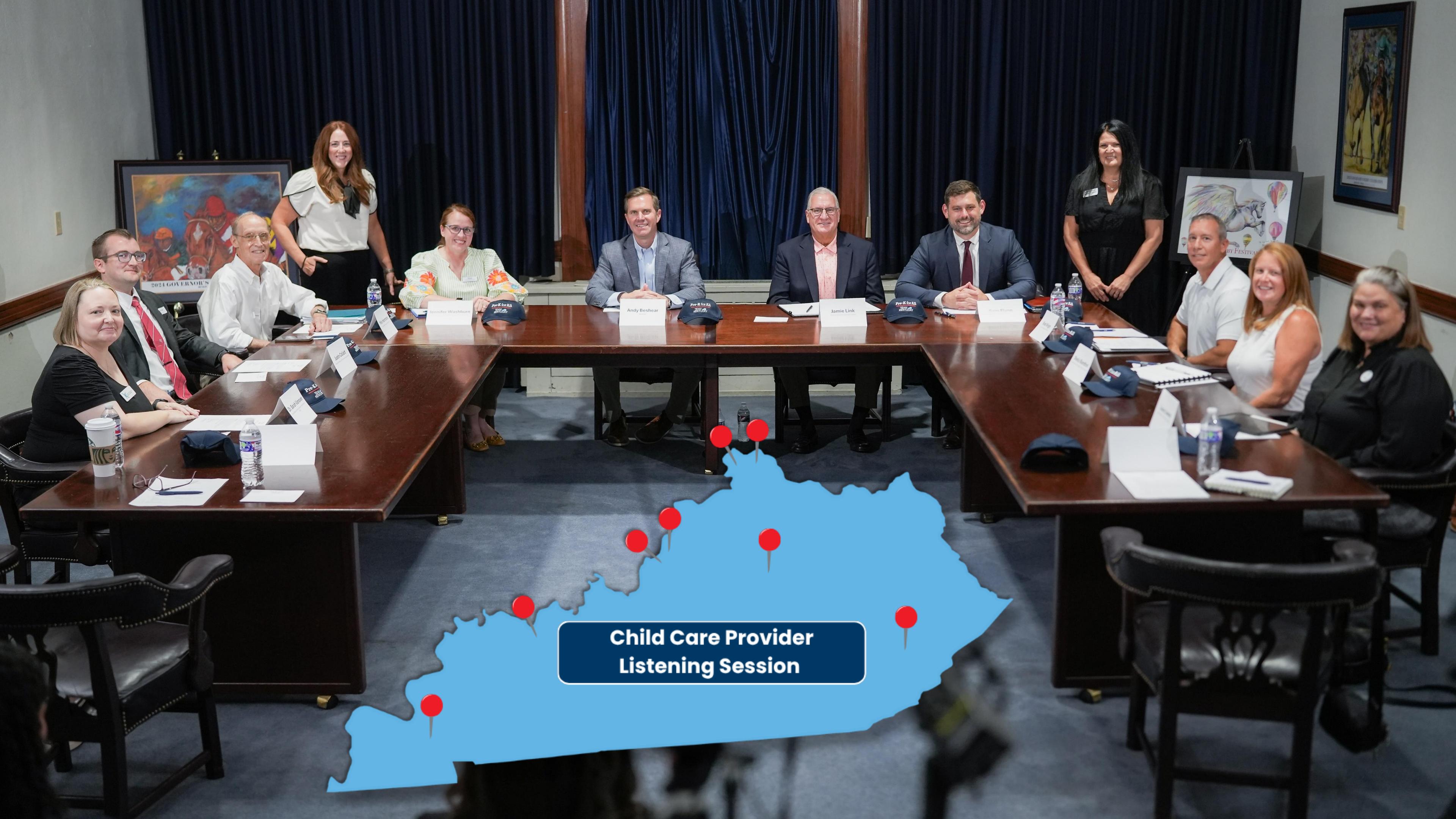
Kentucky should
establish regulatory
flexibility for Pre-K
providers

Recommendation 7: Track Success

Kentucky should establish a unified data system for agency partners and track educational and workforce success data



REFERENCE SLIDES



**Child Care Provider
Listening Session**

Challenges of the Current System

Public Preschool is
not Accessible

Child Care is not
Accessible

Child Care is not
Affordable

Kids are not
Kindergarten-ready

Only 27%

14,200 of
Kentucky's 54,000
4-year-olds are
served by public
preschool.

49/120

Kentucky counties
are designated child
care deserts.

13%

of Kentucky
families' median
household income
is consumed by the
cost of child care.

Only 48%

of Kentucky kids are
Kindergarten-ready
when they arrive to
their first day of
Kindergarten.

Benefits for Children

1

Improves Kindergarten Readiness

Pre-K for All programs effectively prepare children for the academic and social demands of Kindergarten.

2

Academic Benefits Sustained Over Time

Positive impacts on academic achievement are shown through third (3rd) grade, with several studies showing persistence into high school.

3

Broader Developmental Gains Support Long-Term Success

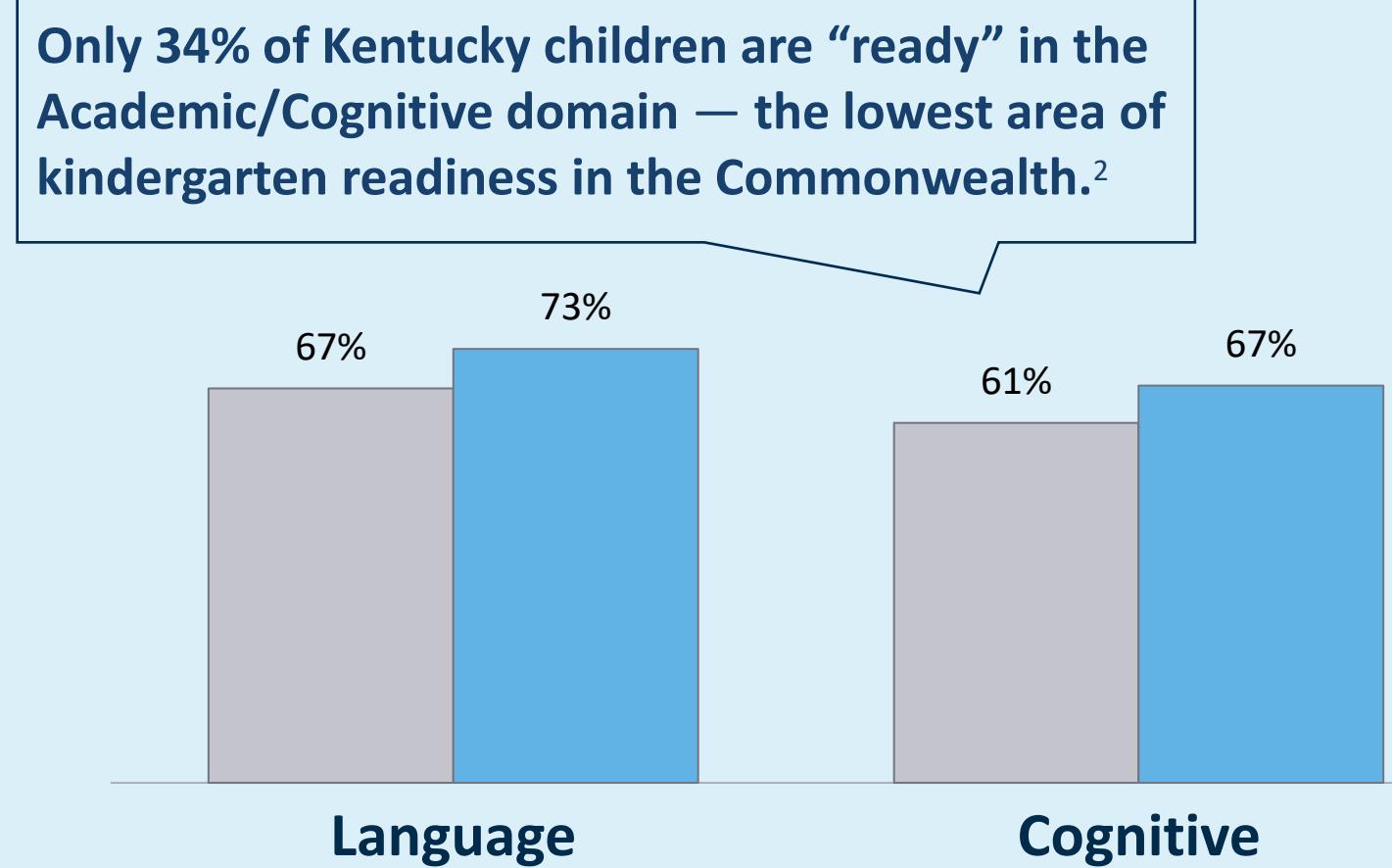
Pre-K participation is associated with stronger social-emotional development and lower rates of identification for special education services.

Pre-K for All Improves Kindergarten Readiness



Alabama Kindergarten Entry Assessment Performance (Fall 2017)¹

No FCPK FCPK



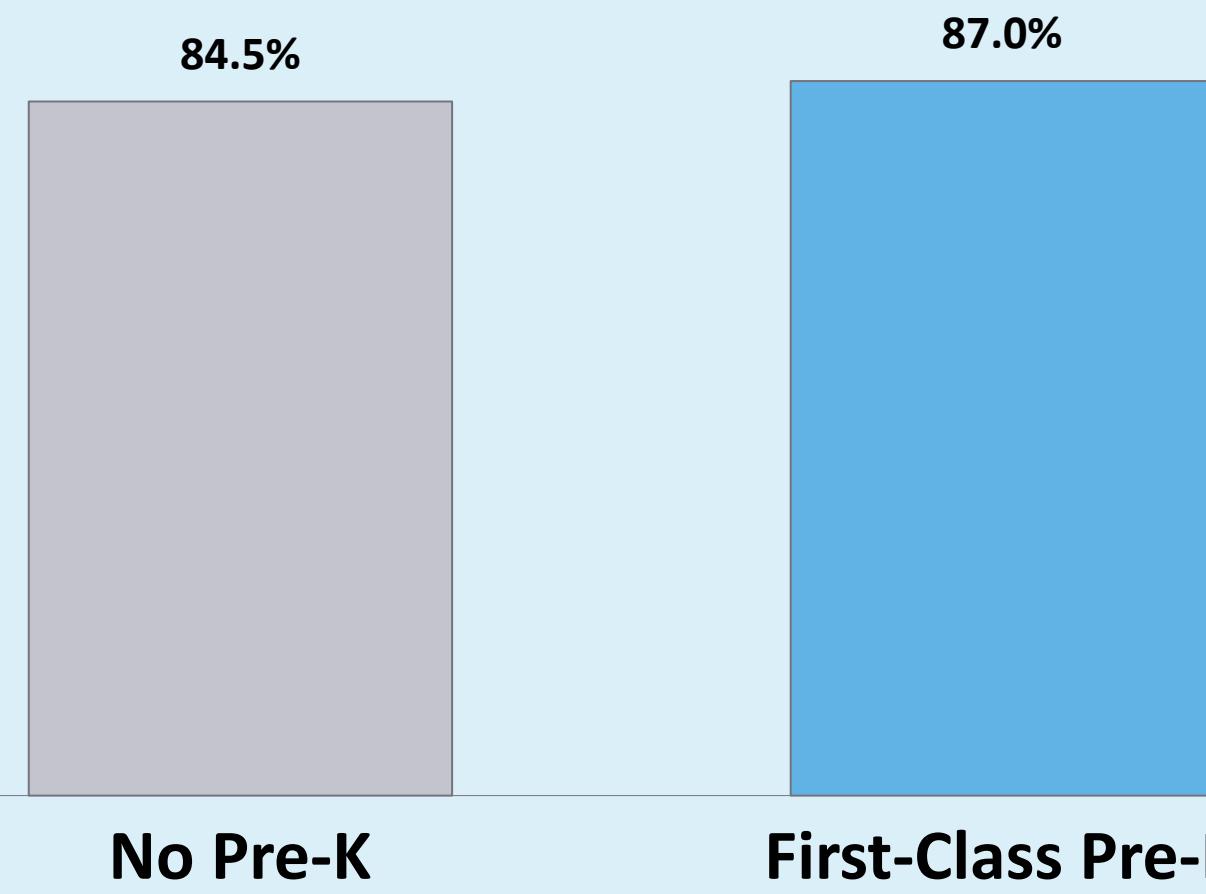
1. See First-Class Pre-K Research Evaluation Team, *Alabama's First Class Pre-K Program Outcomes and Impacts: A Summary of Results*, Al. Dep't of Early Childhood Educ. 1, 10 (Jan. 2020).
2. See KDE School Report Card (SY 2023-2024).

Pre-K Participants have Higher Attendance and Lower Discipline Rates in Later Grades

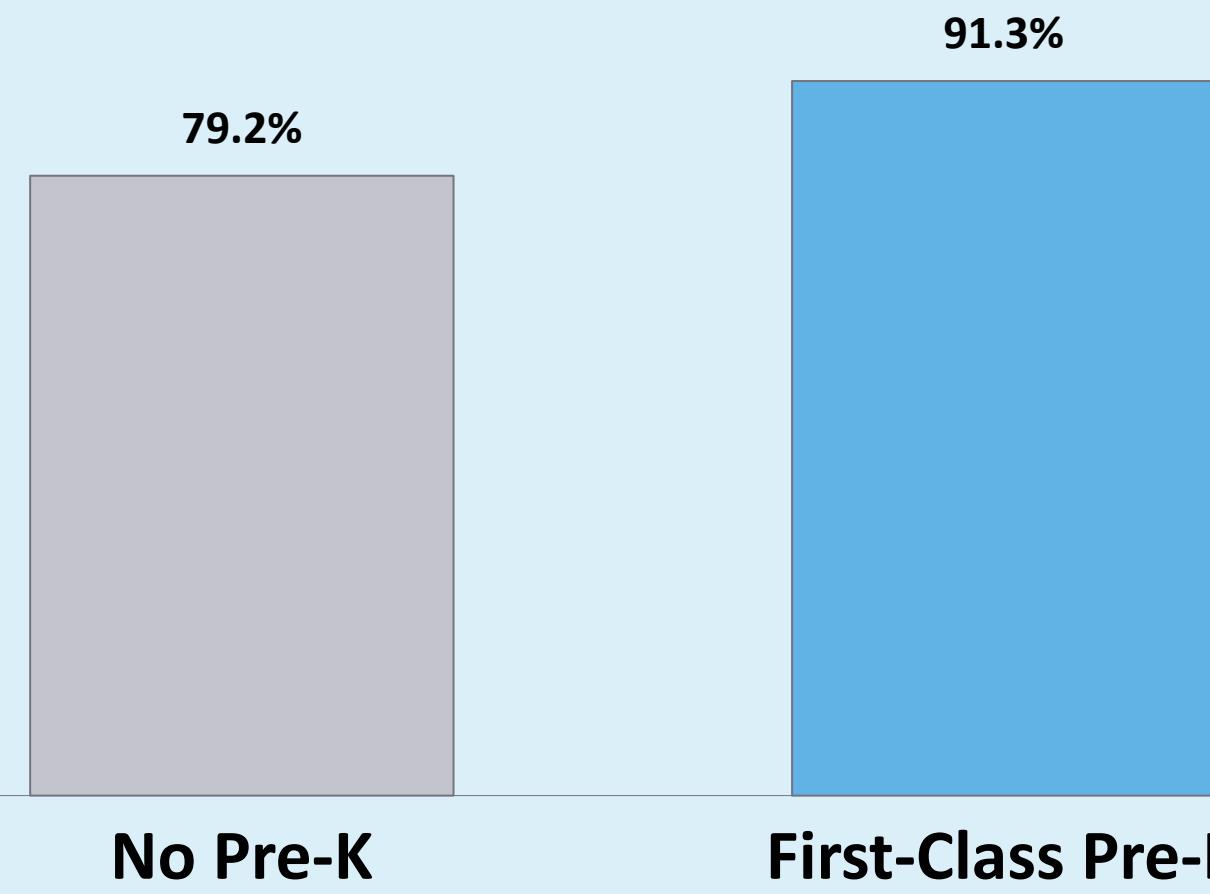


Alabama¹

3rd-8th Grade Students with Less Than 15 Absences (SY 2018-19)



1st-12th Grade Students with No Disciplinary Infractions (SY 2016-17)



1. See generally, Jeana Ross, 2020 Legislative Presentation, Ala. Dep't of Early Childhood Educ. (2020), <https://alison.legislature.state.al.us/files/pdf/lisa/Fiscal/BudgetHearings/2020/ECE-presentation.pdf>.

Benefits for Families

Access to Pre-K Supports Working Families

Enrollment in Pre-K increases labor force participation, particularly among mothers.

Pre-K Leads to Higher Parental Earnings

Families benefit financially from Pre-K, earning more and spending less both during the Pre-K year and in the years that follow.

Access to Free Pre-K Increases Parent Income



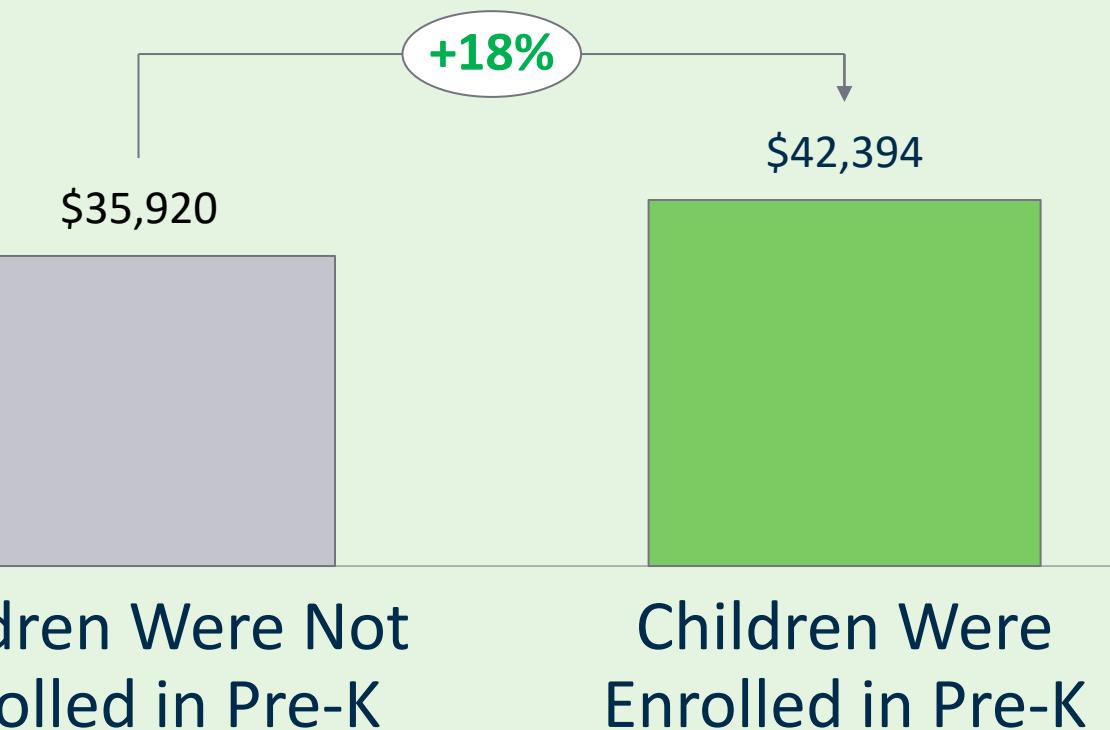
Increase in Parental Earnings if Children are Enrolled in Pre-K¹

During Pre-K Years

+21.7%

Increase in parent earnings was observed during the pre-kindergarten years for families with children enrolled in New Haven Public Schools Pre-K.

Parent Earnings Six (6) Years after Pre-K



1. See John Eric Humphries et al., *Parents' Earnings and the Returns to Universal Pre-Kindergarten* (Nat'l Bureau of Econ. Rsch., Working Paper No. 33038, last revised Apr. 2025); see also Anna Louise Sussman, *Free Pre-K Gives Parents' Income a Long-Lasting Boost*, YALE INSIGHTS (Mar. 10, 2025), <https://insights.som.yale.edu/insights/free-pre-k-gives-parents-income-long-lasting-boost>.

Benefits for Communities

1

State Investment in Pre-K Strengthens Local Economies

Pre-K for All increases future workforce participation, creates jobs for educators, and fuels stronger local economies.

2

Pre-K Reduces Reliance on Social Services

Pre-K promotes positive long-term life outcomes (e.g., greater health outcomes insurance coverage, reduced interactions with the criminal justice, etc.).

3

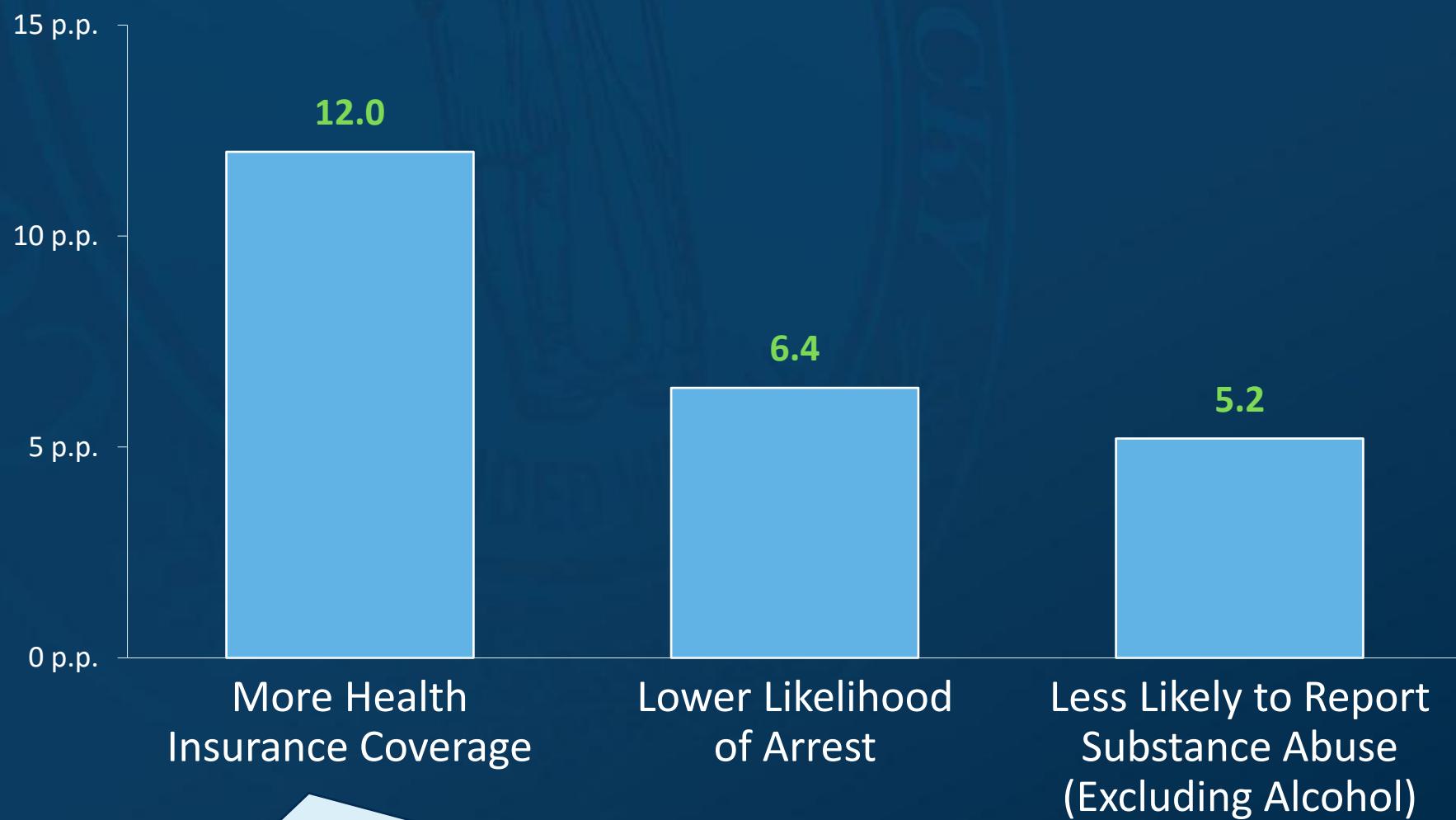
Pre-K Delivers a Strong Return on Investment

Pre-K generates cost savings and increased revenue (including from higher future earnings), delivering returns for both the state and taxpayers.

Pre-K Correlates to Long-term Positive Life Outcomes

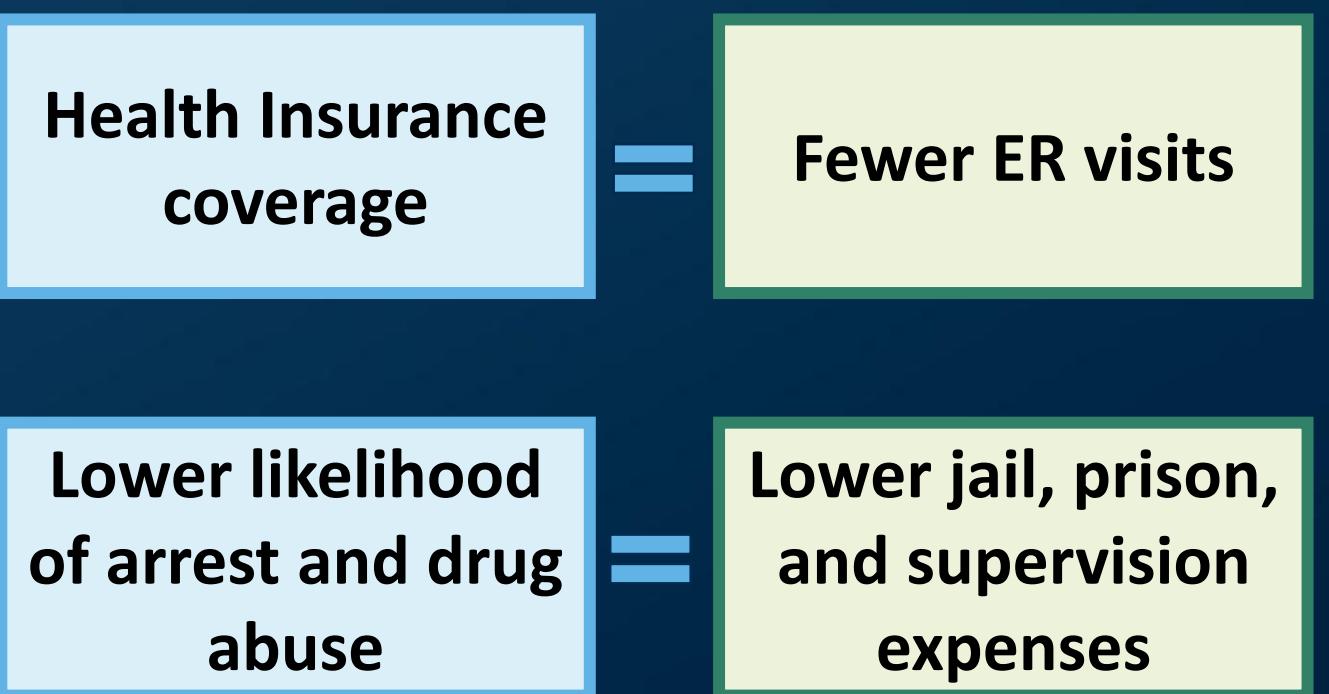
Outcomes of Preschool Participants vs. Nonparticipants

■ Difference between Pre-K Participants and Nonparticipants



Health insurance coverage is often a result of employment.

More positive life outcomes drive lower reliance on social services:



For Our Kids, Pre-K Provides Immediate and Lasting Benefits

Kindergarten

Oklahoma: Pre-K students scored 26% higher on Kindergarten readiness assessments.

6th Grade

Iowa: Pre-K students scored 14 p.p. higher in reading and 12 p.p. higher in math in the 6th Grade.

12th Grade

Alabama: Over 91% of Pre-K participants had no disciplinary infractions from 1st-12th Grade, compared to 79% of students with no Pre-K.

Pre-K

Elementary School

Middle School

High School

College

Pre-K

Alabama: Children meeting or exceeding social-emotional benchmarks rose from 48.8% at Pre-K entry to 93% at school year end.

3rd Grade

Georgia: Children who attended Pre-K had better language, literacy, and executive function skills in 3rd and 4th Grades than children who did not attend.

8th Grade

Alabama: By middle school, Pre-K attendees 87% missed less than 15 days of school – an attendance rate 3 p.p. higher than their peers.

College

Oklahoma: Students who attended Pre-K were 12 p.p. more likely to enroll in college.