Synthesis

How important is it?

Access to high-quality preschool education is one of the most effective strategies for ensuring long-term academic and social success for children. When preschool is offered through the public school system, it provides equitable access to early education, strengthens academic outcomes, and maximizes societal benefits.

The significance of early childhood education, particularly preschool, has been extensively studied and documented. Research indicates that children who attend high-quality preschool programs experience substantial learning gains and are more prepared for school than those who do not. These benefits include improved early literacy, math skills, and social-emotional development.

Moreover, the advantages of preschool education extend beyond immediate academic gains. Long-term studies have shown that early childhood education can lead to higher educational attainment, increased earnings, and reduced criminal activity in later life. Longitudinal studies from the United Kingdom and the United States demonstrate that individuals who attended preschool had higher high school graduation rates and better socio-economic outcomes compared to those who did not attend preschool.
By integrating preschool into the public education system, these benefits can be extended to a greater number of children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds who may otherwise miss out on early learning opportunities. Furthermore, models in Quebec and Ontario demonstrate that preschool education, when combined with child care, increases parents'

workforce participation and supports better work/life balance. For policymakers building preschool onto the foundation of public education provides efficiencies and accountability that are not found under private delivery.

What do we know?

Extensive research has provided valuable insights into the impact of preschool education. Studies have consistently shown that children who attend high-quality preschool programs exhibit better preparedness for school, enhanced cognitive abilities, and improved social skills. These early advantages often translate into long-term benefits, including higher academic achievement, increased likelihood of pursuing higher education, and better socio-economic outcomes in adulthood.

By delivering preschool through the public education system, these benefits can be made more widely available. Public school systems have existing infrastructure, trained educators, and a structured curriculum that ensures quality and consistency. The Abecedarian Early Intervention Project, a controlled study initiated in the 1970s, revealed that participants who received early educational intervention had higher IQ scores, better academic performance, and were more likely to attend college compared to those who did not receive such intervention. These findings underscore the importance of a publicly funded and regulated preschool system that ensures all children, regardless of their economic background, have access to early education.

Furthermore, studies by the National Institute for Early Education Research found that investments in early childhood education bolster student success and have positive impacts on children's early literacy, math, and social-emotional skills. When preschool is part of the public education system, it creates a seamless transition into kindergarten and elementary education, reducing gaps in learning and increasing continuity in instruction.

What can be done?

To harness the benefits of early childhood education, it is imperative to implement policies that make high-quality preschool universally accessible through the public school system. This includes increasing public funding for early childhood programs, ensuring that preschool education is integrated into K-12 education, and maintaining high standards for curriculum and teacher qualifications.

Investing in early childhood education through public schools yields significant returns. Economic evaluations highlighted that early interventions, especially with disadvantaged children, have produced a variety of positive results, including higher school achievement and reduced need for special education later. When preschool is integrated into the public school system, children benefit from the same trained educators, structured learning environments, and accountability measures that ensure high educational standards.

Additionally, expanding access to preschool within public schools can help bridge the educational achievement gap between children from different socio-economic backgrounds. Universal preschool programs have been shown to boost low-income children's reading scores more effectively than targeted preschool programs, suggesting that a fully integrated public school-based preschool system is more productive in promoting educational equity.

In conclusion, offering preschool through the public education system is not only a matter of educational policy but also a strategic investment in the future of society. By ensuring that all children have access to high-quality early education within the public school system, we lay the foundation for a more educated, equitable, and prosperous society.