

Preschool for all

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Brain development is most rapid in the first years of a child's life (" Early Learning" 1). However, not every parent has access to a proper education program to help their children grow to their full potential. President Barack Obama's plan to " make high quality preschool available to every single child in America" is necessary because of the benefits a proper preschool education provides a child. However, in order to provide this proper education, high-quality teachers and adequate funding are key. By analyzing the benefits of preschool education, the ways in which these benefits can be achieved, and the overall structure of Obama's Early Initiative plan, it is clear that all children should have the opportunity to go to a proper preschool.

The most common argument used for advocating a preschool for all is the measurable benefits that preschool going children acquire. Preschool has been proven to increase a child's " social cohesion" (Temple 128), increase high school graduation rates, increase the amount of education achieved in the future for both him/her and their future children, improve the health of both him/her and their future spouse and children, and increase both lifetime savings and charitable work of the individual (128). Nicolle Rockhold, a preschool director and teacher, who has had experience in the field for over twenty years states that the biggest benefit she has seen her preschoolers achieve is socialization. She says: He or she is much more able to interact with other kids and adults, and is able to play appropriately. Kids learn how to be in school, how to act and behave, which then in turn helps them when they get to kindergarten because they have already had that experience. They're not learning [socialization] on top of academics.

Most of the students who come from our preschool love Kindergarten. They are very accustomed to it and comfortable with it and they have the confidence to do what they need to do in Kindergarten. (Rockhold, Nicolle. Personal Interview. 10 November 2015). Many people discard these facts because they do not have a specific value attached to them.

However, preschool education does have a strong monetary value attached to it. The first benefit for both parents and children is the reduced need for future remedial education. Parents will not have to pay for extra schooling or tutoring and children will not have to spend more time in remedial school (129). As stated before, children who attend preschool attain a higher level of education than those who do not. Those who receive a higher education generally receive higher paying jobs in the future (129).

Preschool participation rates have also been negatively correlated to crime rates; the more children who attend preschool, the less crime. If more children were to attend, arrests would be reduced by almost one half resulting in less court cases, treatment, and administration charges (Schweinhart 2). This would be beneficial to society as it would lower taxes (Temple 129). Also, closely linked to crime rates are maltreatment rates. Preschools that encourage parental involvement have seen a reduction in maltreatment resulting in the same monetary benefits as the crime rates (129). With all of these cost reductions accounted for, preschool programs could save each taxpayer an estimated \$88, 433 in their lifetime (Schweinhart 4).

A study done by the ERIC development team starting in 1994 followed a group of over 500 preschoolers and non-preschoolers from age four up to age twenty-seven. At age twenty-seven, the subjects were rounded up for questioning. The study shows that 80% of preschool attendees were employed while only 55% of non attendees were employed (Schweinhart 3). 36% of preschooler attendees owned their own home while 13% of non attendees owned their own home (Schweinhart 3). It is therefore extremely hard to dispute the fact that preschool education is all around beneficial. Even the common dispute that children peak around third grade causing the playing field to level out has been proven wrong (Chandler 1).

In a 2014 research study lead by the National Head Start program, it was found that there was no difference in third-grade students whether they attended preschool or not (Chandler 1). However, this study was proven wrong by a variety of different sources, such as the ones mentioned previously. However, in order to attain all of these measurable benefits a preschool child experiences, the preschool education has to be that of high quality. In order to get the proper education, teachers have to be invested in their work. Many teachers however are not adequately paid for the work they are doing; therefore, they cannot do their job to the fullest. The National Institute for Early Education Research states that “ despite the importance of their responsibilities, American preschool teachers are paid less than half of a kindergarten teacher’s salary- less than janitors, secretaries, and others whose jobs require only a high school diploma and a few years of experience” (Barnett 1).

Due to the fact that these teachers are not paid properly leads to lower program quality, many studies have found that teacher compensation is positively correlated with education quality; the more a teacher is paid and the better benefits given, the greater ability they have for providing high quality learning (Barnett 2). According to Nicolle Rockhold, mentioned above, “ we all need to have a different view of educators that teach early childhood. We need to have more respect for it and more understanding of why learning is so important at this age” (Rockhold, Nicolle. Personal Interview. 10 November 2015). Not only are these early childhood teachers not adequately paid, but the programs themselves do not have enough funding.

If a classroom does not have sufficient learning equipment, the teachers are the ones having to take money out of their already small salary to provide students with basic learning materials (American Teacher). By properly funding both programs and teachers, a higher quality education can be achieved. This higher level preschool education will therefore lead to more future benefits for preschool attending children. Luckily, President Barack Obama has started in on a plan to help provide adequate preschool education for all children that goes by the name of the Early Initiative Plan. The plan hopes to give money to preschools based on each state’s number of four-year-olds in low- and moderate- income families (“ Early Learning Initiative” 2).

Obama also plans to start “ partnering with parents” because family plays a crucial role in the health and growth of a child. He is advocating for a Home Visiting Program that gives families someone to help them with different

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services such as early education and health care (“ Early Learning Initiative” 3). Obama’s plan has already started to take effect in some states. For example, Alabama has increased its state preschool budget by over sixty percent. They plan to have every 4-year old in the state in preschool within the next ten years (Rich 4). This plan seems to be paying off because “ Alabama is one of only five states whose preschool program received top marks based on an assessment of its quality standards by the National Institute for Early Education Research” (Rich 4).

In order for Alabama to be given the money they must keep class sizes down to twenty students and each teacher must have a bachelor’s degree in child development or childhood education (Rich 4). With these restrictions in place, not only is the preschool thriving but the children are too. Given proper funding and proper teachers, these children are able to achieve the benefits that come along with a preschool education. A very common conjecture to Obama’s plan is the cost. The Early Child Initiative Plan would cost the United States billions of dollars. Obama however has thought ahead, and has already increased the taxes on cigarettes and tobacco products by \$0.

94 in order to counteract the cost of a preschool for all children. (Waldron 3). It is therefore clear that all children should be able to attend preschool based on the benefits to the attendee and his/her loved ones. Barack Obama’s Early Initiative Plan is a great start to solving an even greater issue. With proper funding and high quality programs, the children that are soon to become the future will be more well equipped for whatever is to come their way. Preschool for all needs to become a reality and not just a plan.

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