

# EARLY LEARNING:

## AMERICA'S MIDDLE CLASS PROMISE BEGINS EARLY

"I propose working with states to make high-quality preschool available to every child in America. ... Let's do what works, and make sure none of our children start the race of life already behind. Let's give our kids that chance."

– President Barack Obama , February 12, 2013

The foundation of a thriving middle class is access to a strong education for every child beginning in the first few years of life. Sadly, millions of children in this country are cut off from quality early learning. The Obama administration is committed to closing this opportunity gap by working with states and local communities to expand high-quality early education programs for our nation's children.

### THE NEED

There is a tremendous unmet need for high-quality early learning throughout the country. Today, fewer than three in ten 4-year-olds are enrolled in a high-quality preschool program. Yet the importance of early learning is clear. Studies prove that children who have rich early learning experiences are better prepared to thrive in kindergarten and beyond.

Children in Mexico, France, Japan and 21 other countries have a better chance of receiving preschool education than do children in the United States. For children in the United

States who do attend, quality varies widely and access to high-quality programs is even more limited in low-income communities. Doing better is more than just a moral and educational imperative; it's smart government. Every public dollar spent on high-quality preschool returns \$7 through a reduced need for spending on other services and increased productivity and earnings.

### THE GOAL

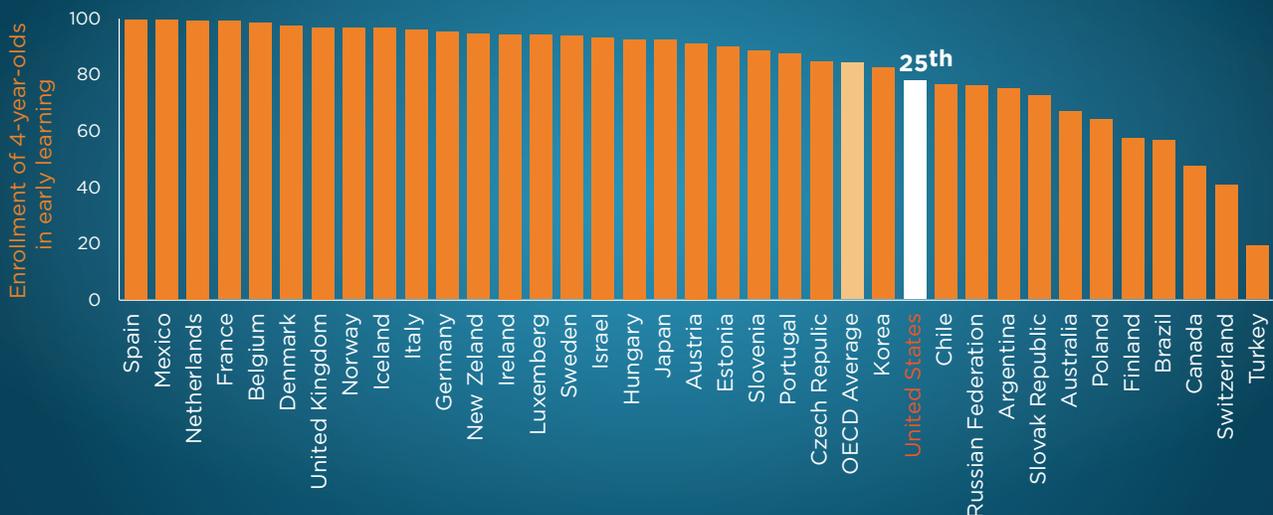
The goal is to provide high-quality early learning opportunities to all children in America so that they enter kindergarten ready to succeed in school and in life. In conjunction with the [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services](#) (HHS), the U.S. Department of Education will work to significantly expand and improve services for young children and their families.

### THE PLAN

The Obama administration has proposed new investments that will establish a continuum of high-quality early learning

## EARLY LEARNING ENROLLMENT

The United States ranks 25th in the world in the enrollment of 4-year-olds in early learning.



Source: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Education at a Glance 2013

for children beginning at birth and continuing to age five. The President's proposal includes:

- Providing access to high-quality infant and toddler care through Early Head Start-child care partnerships
- Expanding voluntary evidence-based home visiting to support our country's most vulnerable families
- Developing a new partnership with states to provide voluntary, high-quality, full-day preschool for all 4-year-olds from families at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty line

## THE DOWN PAYMENT

The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2014 included a down payment on the President's vision to expand early childhood education. The legislation restored much of the cuts to early learning programs as a result of sequestration, and provided new funding to HHS for Early Head Start programs to partner with local child care providers to serve more low-income infants and toddlers in high-quality programs. In addition, funding was provided through the Department of Education's Race to the Top program for Preschool Development Grants to states to develop, enhance, or expand access to high-quality preschool programs for children from low- and moderate-income families.

## THE PRESIDENT'S FISCAL YEAR 2015 BUDGET PROPOSAL

To ensure every child in America has access to high-quality early learning opportunities, the Obama administration has proposed new investments that build upon the progress of states and communities. Key elements of the 2015 budget include:

- **Preschool for All (\$1.3 billion in mandatory funds, as part of a 10-year, \$75 billion commitment):** This new voluntary preschool federal-state partnership will build upon and strengthen existing state systems to provide all low- and moderate-income 4-year-olds with high-quality, publicly-funded preschool. Funded jointly by states and the federal government, the program also will promote access to full-day kindergarten and encourage the expansion of high-quality programs to include children from middle-class families and children under four.

It is fully paid for by raising federal tobacco taxes, which also will help to discourage youth smoking and save lives. Preschool for All-eligible states must have high-quality program standards, the ability to link preschool and K-12 data, and early learning and development standards aligned with success in kindergarten.

- **Preschool Development Grants:** The President is proposing \$500 million—double last year's funding—for Preschool Development Grants. An additional \$250 million would be provided through the Opportunity, Growth, and Security Initiative. These grants will help states, local education agencies, and local governments build the fundamental components of a high-quality preschool system or expand proven early learning programs. These grants will help states lay the groundwork for the Preschool for All effort.

## A CLOSE PARTNERSHIP WITH HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

This additional funding builds on a close partnership between the Departments of Education and HHS. The two departments have worked together to support state-level innovation through the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge program, which has funded 20 states to develop and enhance coordinated early learning and development systems.



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