Early Learning in New Mexico

By Jessica Troe    July 2016

New Mexico families need access to affordable child care and preschool to support working parents and to ensure that children start kindergarten ready to learn. During the first five years of life, children learn critical skills such as language and socio-emotional regulation, which provide a foundation for lifelong learning. High-quality preschool and child care can support healthy development and enable parents to work. Unfortunately, too many children are left behind by the status quo. In fact, differences in children’s cognitive abilities by income are evident at only 9 months old and significantly widen by the time children are age 2. Early learning has positive impacts for children, families, and the economy. It’s time to work to put these programs within reach.

New Mexico families need access to high-quality child care and preschool

New Mexico has 167,129 children under age 6, 61 percent of whom have all available parents in the workforce.

High-quality child care and preschool programs help narrow school readiness gaps, which is particularly important for children of color and those living in low-income families.

The cost of child care is out of reach for families

Annual costs at a child care center in New Mexico average $15,040 for an infant and a 4-year-old, which is 32 percent of the median income for families with children.

For low-income families and people of color, the average cost of child care would constitute the majority of income in most cases.

The current child care system is failing New Mexico families

On average, the Child Care and Development Block Grant, or CCDBG, serves only 20 percent of federally eligible children in New Mexico. This results in only 16,600 New Mexico children served through CCDBG funds. Of those served, 77 percent attend licensed or regulated center-based care.

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Children living in low-income families

- 59% Share of children younger than age 6 living in low-income households

Race and ethnicity of children younger than age 5

- 25% White
- 2% African American
- 59% Latino
- 1% Asian
- 10% American Indian and Alaska Native
- <0.5% Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander
- 3% Two or more races

75.5 percent of New Mexico’s children under age 5 are children of color.
New Mexico families need greater access to high-quality preschool programs

New Mexico PreK is a state-funded program that serves 4-year-olds. Services are administered in public school programs as well as Head Start programs, faith-based centers, family child care homes, municipalities, and universities. No 3-year-olds are served by state-funded preschool programs. This preschool program meets 8 quality benchmarks set by the National Institute for Early Education Research and spends $4,722 annually per student.

In New Mexico, 13 percent of 3-year-olds and 45 percent of 4-year-olds are enrolled in a public preschool program.

Investing in high-quality early learning programs affects economies

Making child care more affordable for families can increase mothers’ workforce participation, resulting in a boost to the state’s economy.

In New Mexico, if child care costs did not exceed more than 10 percent of a family’s income, the state’s economy would increase nearly $12.68 million.

We can do better for New Mexico families

The Center for American Progress proposes two solutions to put high-quality child care and preschool within reach for New Mexico families and create an early childhood learning continuum for children:

• A new High-Quality Child Care Tax Credit would help families afford high-quality care for their children. This tax credit would benefit an estimated 52,300 children in New Mexico and save families an average of $4,323 per year on child care costs.

• Voluntary universal preschool for all 3- and 4-year-olds. This would increase access for 34,100 children in New Mexico.

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*Correction, July 19, 2017: This fact sheet has been updated to clarify that the second pie chart refers to state-specific data.


16 Ibid.


18 Ibid.


