Kansas 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.

Kansas families need access to high-quality child care and preschool

Kansas has 230,729 children under age 6, 66 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. Thirty-nine percent of Kansas children under age 6 live in low-income families.

The supply of high-quality child care is limited. Many states have implemented quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS) to assess and support quality in early care and education programs, but participation rates across the United States are low, and very few programs have been awarded the highest-quality ratings.

The cost of child care is out of reach for families

Annual costs at a child care center in Kansas average $19,547 for an infant and a 4-year-old, which is 30 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 Kansas families

On average, the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) serves only 12 percent of federally eligible children in Kansas. This results in only 14,000 Kansas children served through CCDBG funds. Of those served, 44 percent attend licensed or regulated center-based care.

Kansas families need greater access to high-quality preschool programs

Kansas has two preschool programs for 4-year-olds: the Kansas State Pre-Kindergarten Program and the Kansas Preschool Program. To be eligible for the Kansas State Pre-Kindergarten Program, students must meet at least one of the eight risk factors. The Kansas Preschool Program is only available in a limited number of counties. Fifty percent of the children enrolled in this program must meet one of the eight risk factors or an alternate factor; the other half must meet locally determined standards. No 3-year-olds are served by the state-funded preschool programs. This preschool program meets, on average, 7.1 quality benchmarks set by the National Institute for Early Education Research and spends $2,328 annually per student.

In Kansas, 7 percent of 3-year-olds and 27 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 Kansas, if child care costs did not exceed more than 10 percent of a family’s income, the state’s economy would increase nearly $21.77 million.

We can do better for Kansas families

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

• If child care costs are capped at 10 percent of a family’s income, Kansas families would save $4,892 a year.
• Voluntary universal preschool for all 3- and 4-year-olds. This would increase access for 76,100 children in Kansas.
3 Author’s analysis based on data from Child Care Aware of America, “Parents and the High Cost of Child Care” and the 2015 median income as measured by Kids Count Data Center. See Kids Count Data Center, “Median Family Income Among Households With Children”.

12 Author’s analysis based on data from Child Care Aware of America, “Parents and the High Cost of Child Care” and the 2015 median income as measured by Kids Count Data Center. See Kids Count Data Center, “Median Family Income Among Households With Children”.


17 Ibid.

18 Note: In states that do not serve 3-year-olds or with no state-funded preschool program, enrollment rates include federal Head Start only.


21 Ibid.

22 Author’s analysis based on data from Child Care Aware of America, “Parents and the High Cost of Child Care” and the 2015 U.S. median income as measured by Kids Count Data Center. See Kids Count Data Center, “Median Family Income Among Households With Children.”
