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 has 152,500 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. Thirty-five percent of New Mexico 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. Currently, 96 percent of New Mexico child care centers participate in QRIS.

The cost of child care is out of reach for families. Annual costs at a child care center in New Mexico average $14,790 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 New Mexico families
On average, the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) serves only 20 percent of federally eligible children in New Mexico. This results in only 16,400 New Mexico children served through CCDBG funds. Of those served, 80 percent attend licensed or regulated center-based care.

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, on average, 8 quality benchmarks set by the National Institute for Early Education Research and spends $5,233 annually per student.

In New Mexico, 15 percent of 3-year-olds and 47 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:

• If child care costs are capped at 10 percent of a family’s income, New Mexico families would save $2,882 a year.
• Voluntary universal preschool for all 3- and 4-year-olds. This would increase access for 42,600 children in New Mexico.


18 Ibid.

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


22 Ibid.

