



Executive Summary

A Vision for Pennsylvania's Families and Economy



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**PRE-K
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Fixing Early Care and Education in Pennsylvania

High quality, affordable child care and pre-kindergarten programs are critical for the economic success of Pennsylvania's working families and the readiness of our next generation. Unfortunately, the early care and education system in our Commonwealth is strained, holding back parents, children, and the overall economy.

The Problems:

Parents Can't Find or Afford Care: There are 393 fewer early learning providers today than there were in November 2019. If working families can find care, they often struggle to afford it with child care for two children costing over \$25,000 a year—more than rent in many areas. Middle-class families are squeezed out.

Providers Can't Afford to Operate: State subsidy reimbursement rates don't cover the true cost of providing quality early care and education and programs can only charge parents who pay out of pocket what the market can bear. As a result, early learning teachers are among the lowest paid professions - forcing them to leave for better-paying jobs and/or benefits. This is causing a historic teacher shortage that is further limiting the availability of early learning for working families.

Recent state investments in tax credit programs and the establishment of the child care teacher recruitment and retention initiative have helped ease the crisis points associated with these problems but bold action is needed to fix Pennsylvania's early learning sector for the future.

Pennsylvania must advance policies that do two things simultaneously: help families afford and find early care and education and ensure early education programs have the resources to provide it.



1. Help Families Find and Afford Child Care & Pre-K

- **Expand Eligibility:** Raise income limits for child care subsidy and Pre-K Counts to approximately \$129,000 for a family of four. This supports low- and middle-income working families that are struggling with affordability on many fronts.
- **Increase Awareness:** Invest in public outreach so families understand the programs and financial supports available to them.



2. Build a Robust Early Learning Sector and Improve System Quality

- **Pay the True Cost:** Raise state child care subsidy reimbursement rates to match the private market rate to help providers meet rising costs. Fund a study that establishes a new permanent, fair rate-setting system based on the actual cost to provide high-quality care and education. Increase Pre-K Counts and Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program reimbursement rates to ensure those programs can meet costs and provide appropriate compensation for the teachers.
- **Support Our Educators:** Grow the Child Care Recruitment and Retention grant program to raise wages and recruit and retain staff. Support credentialing and professional development.
- **Include All Children:** Invest in supports that enable programs to successfully support children with special needs and behavioral health challenges.

3. Create a Smarter, More Stable System

- **One-Stop Access for Families:** Position Early Learning Resource Centers (ELRCs) as the single hub families use to navigate child care and pre-k options.
- **Prevent Crisis During Budget Stalls:** Ensure Pre-K Counts and Head Start programs continue receiving payments during budget impasses.
- **Expand Options:** Allow high-quality, licensed family child care homes to provide Pre-K Counts, expanding choices for families.



The Bottom Line for Pennsylvania:

This is more than just child care and pre-k. It's an economic development strategy, workforce participation strategy, and education success strategy. These investments will allow parents to work, prepare our children for school, create good jobs, and build a stronger, and more prosperous Commonwealth.



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December 2025