



From birth to age 5, young children’s brains make millions of neural connections every second — forming brain architecture for life. At no other time in a human’s life will the brain develop at this remarkable speed or with such intricacy. This is the foundation upon which all later learning, behavior, and health depend.

Parents will always be the most important influence during this time of a child's life. Prior to the pandemic, 70 percent of Pennsylvania children under age six had all available parents in the labor force. For our economy to recover, those parents need to return to work. To ensure that can happen, state policymakers must support evidence based programs that strengthen our families and ensure access to high-quality early care and education in order to maximize the potential of the first five years.

As part of the 2021-22 final state budget, Pennsylvania policymakers should:

- ★ Increase high-quality pre-k line items by \$30 million to serve 3,271 new children (\$25 million in Pre-K Counts to serve 2,800 children and \$5 million in the Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program to serve 471).
- ★ Maintain the rate increase provided to Pre-K Counts and Head Start Supplemental Assistance Programs in FY 2020-21, which supports pandemic-related costs such as PPE and cleaning supplies.
- ★ Level-fund the Child Care Services and Child Care Assistance state line items; supplantation of federal funds is unallowable.
- ★ Dedicate federal child care funds to:
 - ★ Serve at least 3,000 additional infants and toddlers in new high-quality contracted slots to get more parents back to work and move towards providing more stable funding for programs. (Estimated \$48 million)
 - ★ Restore and fully-fund Education and Retention Awards for teachers and directors that are achieving higher degrees and credentials, recognizing highly-qualified professionals are key to maintaining and building high-quality programs for children. (Estimated \$30 million)
- ★ Child care is an essential component to our economic recovery; work with us to ensure federal stimulus funds are invested wisely to strengthen the system as we move out of the pandemic and support working families.
- ★ Support more pregnant women and families with young children by providing for a collective \$6.3 million increase in funding for evidence-based home visiting with \$3.9 million allocated for the Community-Based Family Center line and \$2.4 million allocated for the Nurse-Family Partnership line in the Department of Human Services' budget.