

Association for the Education of Young Children of Missouri Position Statement on Universal Prekindergarten

In order to ensure that all children have the opportunity to attend a high-quality prekindergarten program, AEYC-MO supports the concept of a state-funded voluntary universal prekindergarten program for Missouri's three- and four-year olds. High-quality prekindergarten programs provide benefits to the children, families, and the community. Research show children who have quality pre-k experience are more likely to graduate from high school, less likely to repeat a grade, perform better on standardized assessments, are less likely to require special education services, and are less likely to be arrested for a violent crime or become teen parents.ⁱ Prekindergarten also contributes to families that are more stableⁱ, enhances the parenting skills of the children's parents, increases the likelihood of mothers of the children in the program obtaining good jobs, and produces positive effects for future generations.ⁱⁱ

From 1980 through 2002, the number of states that provide publicly funded prekindergarten programs has grown from 10 to 38 states.ⁱⁱⁱ Of these 38 states, Missouri's Preschool Project currently ranks 34th in access to four year olds and 13th with access to three year olds (26 states offer access to three year olds). This translates into only 3.1% of Missouri's three and four year olds receiving state funded prekindergarten services.^{iv} Added to the number of three and four year olds receiving services through Head Start (9.5%) and early childhood special education (5.8%), only 18.4% of Missouri's three and four year olds have access to state or federally funded prekindergarten programs.^{iv}

Currently, the Early Childhood Coordinating Board is reviewing the issue of universal prekindergarten for Missouri. AEYC-MO supports the intent of this effort and hopes that the recommendations from the Board include the following.

- The implementation of voluntary universal prekindergarten in Missouri should progress in a manner that ensures that programs are of high quality and include a developmentally appropriate curriculum.
- Implementation should not be left to public school districts alone. Rather, a collaborative effort between public schools and existing community early childhood programs should be created to both maximize resources and to provide quality prekindergarten for three- and four-year olds in all settings. By bringing together public school early childhood programs, Head Start, and child care centers, a foundation for a comprehensive and well integrated early childhood care and education system^v will be created to meet the needs of Missouri's three- and four-year olds.

ⁱ Pre[k] Now (2008). www.preknow.org/advocate/factsheets/benefits.cfm

ⁱⁱ Schulman, K. (2005) Overlooked benefits of prekindergarten. NIEER Policy Report.

ⁱⁱⁱ Gormley, W.T., Gayer, T., Phillips, D., & Dawson, B. (2005). The effects of universal pre-k on cognitive development. *Developmental Psychology*, 41(6), 872-884.

^{iv} National Institute for Early Education Research (2006). *The state of preschool: 2006 state preschool yearbook*.

^v Paprocki, C. & Kolben (2002). *The universal prekindergarten program in Community School District Eleven, New York City: A study in collaborative leadership and Systems Building*.

The Position Statement on Universal Kindergarten was developed based on goals set by
the AEYC-MO public policy platform.

For more information about AEYC-MO's Position Statements, please contact
the AEYC-MO Public Policy Committee at info@aeyc-mo.org