



FIRST FOCUS
CAMPAIGN FOR CHILDREN

March 8, 2013

The Honorable Bob Casey
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Casey:

On behalf of the First Focus Campaign for Children (FFCC), I am writing to express our support of the Prepare All Kids Act (S.502). FFCC is a bipartisan organization that advocates directly for legislative change in Congress to ensure children and families are a priority in federal policy and budget decisions. As an organization that works on a number of issues that affect children, we have a unique understanding of the importance of high-quality pre-K that prepares children to enter school ready to learn and benefits children throughout their lives.

The early years of a child's life are essential for a child's healthy development, and pre-K is essential to that development. There are substantial long-term benefits of high-quality pre-K, including increased likelihood of graduating from high school and a decreased risk of teen pregnancy and entering the criminal justice system. Though the academic achievement gap between low-income students and middle- and high-income students begins before a child even enters kindergarten, early education can help mitigate some of the negative effects of childhood poverty and close that gap.

Despite the benefits and importance of high quality pre-K, many families cannot access these programs. Only 39 states offer state-funded pre-K, and these have seen nation-wide funding cuts in the last two years. As a result, only 4 percent of three-year-olds and 28 percent of four-year-olds are enrolled in state-funded pre-K. Access to other options for early education are also limited; in 2010, 4.5 percent of eligible toddlers and 29 percent of eligible children age three to five were enrolled in Early Head Start or Head Start. With the ever-increasing cost of private high quality early education, many families cannot send their children to high quality pre-K programs.

The Prepare All Kids Act would make a necessary federal investment in early childhood education by creating state-federal partnerships to fund high-quality pre-K programs. Quality requirements such as a curriculum based on the healthy cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development will ensure that these pre-K programs will benefit participants, while prioritizing access for children in low-income families, English language learners, and children with disabilities will ensure that children who often cannot access other forms of pre-K will be included in these high-quality programs.

Thank you for introducing this important legislation and for your continued work to expand access to and improve the quality of early learning programs. We look forward to working with you on this important issue. If you have any questions or comments please contact Kevin Lindsey at KevinL@firstfocus.net.

Sincerely,

Bruce Lesley
President