



# THE CASE FOR PRE-K IN OHIO

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The Conceptual, Theoretical, and Empirical  
Foundations for Pre-K Expansion

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## Executive Summary

On October 9-10, 2014, the Crane Center for Early Childhood Research and Policy (CCEC) at The Ohio State University, in partnership with the City of Columbus, hosted the inaugural *State of Pre-K Symposium on Children and Community Roundtable*. This annual event seeks to address cross-cutting, state-of-the-art issues related to early childhood education (ECE) by bringing together key constituencies concerned with ECE, including policymakers, practitioners, business community members, and researchers. The impetus for this event is grounded on the belief that by bringing together members of these key constituencies, we will be better equipped to assess the current state of the field and to shape future directions of research, practice, and policy. From among the range of topics discussed across the two-day event, four themes emerged as particularly pressing: **funding**, **staffing**, **evidence**, and **political will**. Specifically, panelists expressed concerns regarding how to achieve the necessary levels of funding for expansion of ECE, how to ensure the quality of and adequate pipeline for the ECE workforce, how to contend with the mixed evidence regarding the long-term benefits of ECE, and how to increase political will to advance ECE initiatives in Columbus and the state of Ohio.



**THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY**  
COLLEGE OF  
EDUCATION AND HUMAN ECOLOGY

Crane Center for Early Childhood Research and Policy (CCEC) and  
The Schoenbaum Family Center (SFC)  
*Partnering to improve children's well-being  
through research, practice, and policy.*

# Recommendations

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To achieve the **levels of funding needed for expansion** of ECE, we recommend that the legislature increase existing levels of funding for ECE and blend these effectively with currently available federal, state, and local funding sources to ensure that all 3- to 5-year-olds in Ohio are guaranteed a placement within a quality ECE program.

To ensure the **quality of and adequate pipeline for the ECE workforce**, we recommend that salaries for early childhood educators be on par with educators who teach in the primary grades; we also recommend that all early childhood educators be required to have a university degree in ECE or a related field and to provide evidence of high-quality instructional practices in the classroom.

To contend with the **mixed evidence regarding the long-term benefits** of ECE, we recommend that a systematic evaluation be conducted to determine the benefits of young children's participation in ECE within the state of Ohio using secondary data or, if necessary, primary data collected for this purpose. This evaluation could help to benchmark the expected gains children should achieve through participation in ECE across key readiness domains, including language, literacy, social-emotional, and motor skills, and these benchmarks could be used by ECE programs to ensure that children are deriving expected benefits.

To increase **political will to advance ECE initiatives** in Columbus and the state of Ohio, we recommend that extensive and coordinated public action be taken to build and sustain political will, including writing individual and group letters to policymakers, making phone calls to and visiting with political representatives, and actively monitoring and publicizing policymakers' activity on issues related to ECE. For this to occur productively, it is important for an Ohio-based advocacy group to provide leadership around these issues.

# First Annual Symposium on Children and Community Roundtable

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On October 9-10, 2014, the Crane Center for Early Childhood Research and Policy (CCEC) at The Ohio State University partnered with the City of Columbus to host the first *State of Pre-K Symposium on Children and Community Roundtable*. This annual event is designed to address current issues in the field of early childhood education (ECE) and to bring together the various constituencies engaged around those issues. The event blends together a roundtable featuring a panel presentation that discusses issues of local concern, and a symposium that brings leading researchers to Ohio State to share their work and vision. In general, the goal of the event is to tackle a pressing issue related to children's wellbeing, broadly defined. We believe that by bringing together top researchers, practitioners, and policymakers in the field to provide current thinking and findings on the issue, we are better able to identify what we know and to shape future directions for research, practice, and policy.

The impetus for establishing this annual event is to provide a forum that can guide our efforts in Ohio as we continue to expand and improve ECE for the 700,000 young children in our state. By bringing together policymakers, practitioners, and researchers in these discussions, we can ensure that policies and practices are grounded in findings from empirical research. In addition, we can ensure that early childhood researchers are knowledgeable about those issues on the minds of policymakers and practitioners.

The topic for this inaugural event was the state of Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) in Ohio, particularly those issues surrounding *expansion* of Pre-K, and the timing of the symposium was deliberate. Across Ohio, including in the state capital of Columbus, there is growing interest in and momentum towards increasing young children's participation in ECE, including (but not limited to) pre-kindergarten, Head Start, and child care. The number of slots available to support children's participation in ECE is on the rise, supported by such initiatives as the Kasich-Coleman Early Start Columbus partnership launched in 2014. Such efforts parallel city and state initiatives being launched across the country, as well as federal initiatives targeting the same goal, such as President Obama's *Preschool for All* initiative. These programs reflect the decades of quality research showing the benefit of ECE to the development and well-being of children, and the interests of policymakers and practitioners in ensuring that such programming is available to all.

# Speakers

## 2014 Distinguished Speakers

### **Dr. Andrew Mashburn,**

Associate Professor in Applied Developmental Psychology at Portland State University, presented a lecture titled *What research says about access to high quality early childhood education.*

### **Dr. Hirokazu Yoshikawa,**

Courtney Sales Ross University Professor of Globalization and Education at New York University, presented a lecture titled *Investing in our future: The evidence base on quality preschool education.*

The October 9th Community Roundtable featured eight panelists whose discussion was moderated by Mr. Fred Andrlé of WOSU Public Media and The Ohio State University. In alphabetical order, the panelists included:

**Mayor Michael Coleman,** *Mayor of the City of Columbus*

**Ms. Tanny Crane,** *President and Chief Executive Officer, Crane Group*

**Dr. Stephanie Curenton,** *Assistant Professor, Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, Rutgers University*

**Dr. Laura Justice,** *EHE Distinguished Professor and Executive Director, Crane Center for Early Childhood Research and Policy, The Ohio State University*

**Senator Peggy Lehner,** *State Senator for the 6th Ohio Senate District, Chairman of the Senate Standing Committee on Education and Vice-Chair of the Finance Subcommittee on Education*

**Dr. Andrew Mashburn,** *Associate Professor in Applied Developmental Psychology, Portland State University*

**Dr. Angel Rhodes,** *Early Childhood Education and Development Officer, Office of Ohio Governor John R. Kasich*

**Dr. Hirokazu Yoshikawa,** *Courtney Sales Ross University Professor of Globalization and Education, New York University*

The October 10th Symposium on Children featured two distinguished speakers who each lectured on the symposium topic; their lectures are available for download on the CCEC website ([ccec.ehe.osu.edu](http://ccec.ehe.osu.edu)). After the lectures, three respondents representing research, practice, and policy provided their reactions to the lectures.

## 2014 Respondents

**Dr. Stephanie Curenton,** Assistant Professor, Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, Rutgers University. Dr. Curenton provided a response representing the perspective of the research community.

**Mr. Jack Fette,** Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Olentangy Local School District. Mr. Fette provided a response representing the perspective of the practitioner community.

**Senator Peggy Lehner,** State Senator for the 6th Ohio Senate District, Chairman of the Senate Standing Committee on Education and Vice-Chair of the Finance Subcommittee on Education. Senator Lehner provided a response representing the perspective of the policymaker community.

# Symposium Themes

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The topic of the first annual Symposium on Children and Community Roundtable was relatively general – *The State of Pre-K: The Conceptual, Theoretical, and Empirical Foundations for Pre-K Expansion* – and speakers and panelists were free to discuss, debate, and highlight those issues of most interest to them. Although a range of topics was discussed across the two-day event, there were four themes that permeated the lectures and panels: **funding, staffing, evidence,** and **political will.** We summarize major points raised in relation to each of these themes, as the goal of the event is to identify what we know and to shape future directions for research, practice, and policy; thus, it is important to consider these themes and their implications.

## Funding

Funding was emphasized as a major concern for Pre-K expansion throughout the roundtable and symposium, with speakers and panelists asserting the importance of determining where and how the funds to provide access to ECE to all children in Ohio will be obtained, and considering the value of universal versus targeted preschool. To the first point, it was noted that provision of ECE is expensive, and that it is difficult to determine the number of children who are currently underserved and would require increased funding. Therefore, it is not possible at this time to determine how much money is needed to achieve full expansion. To the second point, the possibility of funding and providing preschool for all children in the state (referred to as universal preschool) was generally eschewed in favor of targeted preschool, in which preschool would be assured for all children whose families exhibit financial need. The focus on targeted preschool over universal preschool, in expansion initiatives, was seen to reflect both funding and priority (or political will).

It must be pointed out that successful expansion efforts were referenced, including initiatives in Boston, San Antonio, and Oklahoma. Boston Public Schools provides universal preschool by offering a full-day preschool slot to every child in the city, regardless of income. In San Antonio, a sales-tax increase approved in 2012 is paving the way for all children in the city to have a preschool slot. In Oklahoma, universal access to preschool has been available for more than one decade; Oklahoma is particularly interesting as it is a conservative state with a small budget.



Senator Peggy Lehner, Mayor Michael B. Coleman, and Dr. Stephanie Curenton

## Staffing

Given that children's participation in and access to ECE programs are likely to increase in the near future, in light of the many local, state, and federal initiatives aligned to this goal, a critical concern relates to the workforce who will staff these programs. A major goal of preschool expansion is to not only increase the number of slots available for young children, but as well to ensure that these slots are in programs of quality. Therefore, staffing of ECE programs was emphasized in both the roundtable and symposium events.

In many ways, it seems that high-quality ECE programs are conditional upon the program being staffed by high-quality educators. In fact, as Professor Mashburn pointed out in his Distinguished Lecture, a program that is high quality and elevates children's development and learning is one that is staffed by teachers who provide high-quality instruction. Nonetheless, the ECE workforce today is quite heterogeneous with respect to the ability of educators to provide children with high-quality instruction, with many teachers under-compensated and under-trained to provide such instruction. To this end, as we expand the number of slots available for children in ECE, and correspondingly the number of educators needed in this sector of the educational workforce, we must decide whether we want these educators to be minimally qualified with low wages and limited benefits, as is the case in many programs today, or integral and valued members of the profession of teaching.



Dr. Hirokazu Yoshikawa

## Evidence

The growing evidence base on the effectiveness of ECE, particularly Pre-K, was discussed throughout the Community Roundtable and was a primary point of emphasis during the Distinguished Lectures. Although early evidence on the value of Pre-K came from small-scale programs, such as the Perry Preschool Project, there are a number of recent, rigorous studies that show positive effects of Pre-K programs that have been implemented on larger scales. For example, Dr. Yoshikawa presented research on the expansion of Pre-K in Boston, which has shown large impacts on children's reading and math skills. Research on Oklahoma's statewide universal Pre-K program has also shown significant positive effects on children's development, demonstrating that statewide programs can provide high-quality early educational experiences and improve learning among young children. Overall, the invited lecturers highlighted the considerable body of evidence that shows ECE is an effective way to provide children with skills and social behaviors needed to start a successful educational career.

Both the roundtable and symposium speakers also discussed emerging evidence on what constitutes a high-quality early childhood classroom. Although structural supports, such as low child-teacher ratios, are important, their primary function is to create an environment that facilitates positive classroom interactions. These classroom interactions are the key elements that promote learning and social development among young children. Importantly, recent evidence, including the Boston Pre-K program, suggests that programmatic changes such as implementing a targeted curriculum and providing coaching to teachers throughout the year can create high-quality classroom environments. Implementing these evidence-based strategies into the design of current and future ECE efforts ensures that we are providing the best possible environment for young children to develop within.



Community Roundtable participants from left to right: Senator Peggy Lehner, Mayor Michael B. Coleman, Dr. Stephanie Curenton, Dr. Andrew Mashburn, Mr. Fred Andrie, Dr. Hirokazu Yoshikawa, Dr. Angel Rhodes, Ms. Tanny Crane, and Dr. Laura Justice

## Political Will

The fourth theme, heavily emphasized in the roundtable discussions, concerned the importance of political will. Panelists strongly emphasized that political will is critical to Pre-K expansion in Columbus, the state, and the country as a whole. By definition, political will acknowledges the need for effective cooperation on the part of political leaders (Ristei, 2010). However, building political will and sustaining it over time requires the cooperation and long-term commitment of multiple agents—policymakers, the general public, ECE practitioners, and the business community. Whereas the need for such a wider collaboration was acknowledged by all roundtable speakers, the absence, in some circles, of political will for ECE initiatives was also acknowledged.

The current lack of political will on the part of Ohio policymakers was identified as being related to the following factors: (a) absence of an irrefutable preponderance of evidence that shows the positive and long-term impacts of Pre-K education; (b) lack of economic analyses that show the cost of universal (or expanded) Pre-K education and cost-benefit analyses of investments in Pre-K programs; and (c) lack of public support for universal (or expanded) Pre-K programs.

If one were to closely examine these factors, several things stand out. First, although there is plenty of evidence demonstrating the benefits of Pre-K education, the existence of studies that provide contradictory conclusions provides some support to opponents of ECE expansion policy. Second, although few, there are cost-benefit analyses that demonstrate positive rates of return on Pre-K investments available from various programs across the country (see, for instance, Bartik, Gormley, & Adelstein, 2012; Heckman, Moon, Pinto, Savelyev, & Yavitz, 2010; Reynolds, 2002, 2011). However, a realistic estimate of the exact cost of universal (or expanded) Pre-K education in Columbus or Ohio may be difficult to attain due to the large variability in costs and the difficulty in accessing such information. Nonetheless, this is not an impossible task, especially if there is real interest in supporting the production of such a study. Third, there is evidence that public support for ECE expansion already exists in Columbus, and the Community Roundtable discussion is evidence of such support.

# Recommendations

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In consideration of these four themes that emerged during the 2014 Symposium on Children and Community Roundtable, recommendations can be advanced to shape future directions relevant to expanded Pre-K for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers.

## Funding

Increase existing levels of funding and find alternative ways to maximize current funding.

Determine the number of children who are underserved in ECE to arrive at real estimates of the costs of expansion.

Streamline funding requirements across different funding sources so as to mitigate the burden put on Pre-K providers who accept ECE subsidies.

As the political will for Pre-K expansion grows, find creative ways to generate new sources of funding, such as social impact bonds.

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## Staffing

Ensure that ECE teachers are integral members of the profession of teaching by pursuing salary equity with educators in the later grades.

Provide continuous professional development training so that ECE teachers can improve their skills

Ensure that ECE teachers have the required qualifications and a work caseload that research has found to be conducive to high-quality education.

Support opportunities for ECE teachers to engage with other educators in the profession of teaching via conferences, workshops, or seminars.

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## Political Will

Encourage public action to build and sustain political will, including: (a) writing individual or group letters to policymakers, (b) making phone calls to political representatives, and (c) actively monitoring the policymakers' activity on issues related to ECE.

Engage the business community and community organizations to actively lobby for the expansion of Pre-K education.

Engage the business community, community organizations, and ECE practitioners to openly support the expansion of Pre-K education.

Collaborate with mass media outlets and utilize social media avenues to promote ECE policy initiatives and raise their visibility in the community.

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## Evidence

Ensure that Ohio Pre-K expansion policies incorporate plans for program evaluation.

Utilize specific examinations of classroom quality, program features, and professional development initiatives to allow the state to continually improve its early childhood programs over time.

Ensure that well-established research designs are implemented to examine the impacts of Pre-K on children's development.

Create partnerships with local school districts to examine the alignment between early childhood programs and elementary school classrooms, an issue that has critical implications for the long-term effectiveness of ECE programs.

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## Author Note

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## About the Crane Center for Early Childhood Research and Policy (CCEC)

Established in 2013, the Crane Center for Early Childhood Research and Policy (CCEC) is housed within The Ohio State University's College of Education and Human Ecology. The Crane Center for Early Childhood Research and Policy and Schoenbaum Family Center formed a Partnership in 2014 to improve children's well-being through research, practice, and policy.

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# 2015 SYMPOSIUM ON CHILDREN THE STATE OF PRE-K: EDUCATING YOUNG DUAL-LANGUAGE LEARNERS

CCEC OCT 23 | 2015

The Crane Center for Early Childhood Research and Policy (CCEC) hosts an annual Symposium on Children to tackle a pressing issue related to children's well-being, broadly defined. By bringing together top researchers, practitioners, and policymakers in the field to provide current thinking and findings on the issue, we are able to identify what we know and help shape future directions for research, practice, and policy.

The theme for the **2015 Symposium on Children** is The State of Pre-K: Educating Young Dual-Language Learners and will include research presentations led by Dr. Carol Scheffner Hammer, Temple University, and Dr. Elizabeth Peña, University of Texas at Austin. These presentations will be followed by a panel discussion involving representative practitioners and policy makers.

## 2015 SYMPOSIUM ON CHILDREN EVENT DETAILS

**WHEN:** 12–5 P.M. | OCT 23, 2015

**WHERE:** OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY FACULTY CLUB, 181 OVAL DRIVE SOUTH, COLUMBUS, OH 43210

## SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

12–1 p.m.	Registration, Poster Session, Opening Remarks, Lunch
1–3 p.m.	Presentations
3–3:15 p.m.	Break
3:15–4 p.m.	Discussion Panel
4–5 p.m.	Reception

This event is free and open to the public. Space is limited. RSVP to [ccec@osu.edu](mailto:ccec@osu.edu).

Visit [ccec.ehe.osu.edu](http://ccec.ehe.osu.edu) to learn about the Educating Young Dual-Language Learners Professional Development Workshops following the Symposium on Children.