

# Newsletter

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## Pre-Kindergarten Education Experiences Major Growth Spurt

A surge in state funding and support for pre-K programs is one of the strongest trends in public education today. In a recent article in the *Wall Street Journal*, Deborah Solomon called the movement “one of the most significant expansions in public education in the 90 years since World War I, when kindergarten first became standard in American schools.”

Here are some indicators of the scope and direction of the expansion:

- In 2006-2007, states spent \$4.2 billion on pre-K programs—up 45% from the previous year.
- Thirty-eight states currently provide some pre-K support to school districts.
- Florida recently marked the second anniversary of its voter-mandated voluntary full-day pre-K program, with more than half of the state’s four-year-olds enrolled.
- Nationwide, 55% of three- and four-year-olds are now enrolled in a school of some sort.
- A national “Economic Summit on Early Childhood Investment” convened in Colorado in early September 2007, with three state governors and 125 business and policy leaders in attendance.

Deborah Solomon’s graphic, [“The Push for Schooling Before Kindergarten.”](#) encapsulates her research on the status, spending, and enrollment in state-funded pre-K education in the U.S.

[The State of Preschool 2006](#) by W. Steven Barnett, Jason T. Hustedt, Laura E. Hawkinson, and Kenneth B. Robin, the fourth in a series of extensive annual reports profiling state-funded prekindergarten programs in the United States prepared under the auspices of the National Institute for Early Education Research, can be downloaded online.

## Why Pre-K, Why Now?

Many supporters of universal pre-K education argue that it's a prudent investment—children who have a strong foundation in early learning are more likely to remain in school and become productive citizens. Nobel laureate James Heckman and co-author D. V. Masterov, both of the University of Chicago, make the case in "[The Productivity Argument for Investing in Young Children](#)."

The spread of high stakes testing, which some critics argue has made kindergarten "the new first grade," has increased pressures to have all children reading much earlier, and pre-K is viewed by many as a way to support that goal.

## What Kind of Pre-K: Child-Centered or Academic-Focused?

Victoria Clayton, an MSNBC contributor, examines this issue in an article titled "[Should Preschools Be All Work, No Play?](#)"

*Baltimore Sun* staff writers Ruma Kumar and John-John Williams IV offer another take on this question in "[A longer day, but less time for play: New kindergarten is more rigorous](#)"

## How Do We Assess Young Children's Learning—and the Effectiveness of Pre-K Programs?

As the Early Childhood Assessment Group of the National Goals Panel reports, "...young children are notoriously difficult to assess accurately, and well-intended testing efforts in the past have done unintended harm." In the interest of accurate assessment that supports growth and does no harm to the child, the group developed [Principles and Recommendations for Early Childhood Assessments](#).

The Alliance for Childhood has issued "[A Call to Action on the Education of Young Children](#)" that warns against the use of developmentally inappropriate assessments and calls for early learning that "emphasizes experiential, hands-on activities, open-ended creative play, and caring human relationships."

Texas and Florida have developed systems for rating pre-K programs that are based on assessments of the children enrolled. The Florida Kindergarten Readiness Screener, for example, uses a subset of items from a commercial "embedded" assessment that's based on the teacher's observations and judgments about children across seven domains, along with the first two measures of the *Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills*<sup>™</sup> (DIBELS<sup>™</sup>) for kindergarten (Letter Naming Fluency and Initial Sound Fluency). Both Texas and Florida then rate pre-schools on the basis of children's scores and make the ratings public.

A recent article by Staci Hupp in the *Dallas Morning News*, “[State creates ratings for early childhood centers](#),” provides more information about Texas’s system for rating pre-K programs on how well they prepare children for kindergarten.

*Education Week* also takes a look at how “[States Move Toward Closer Scrutiny of Preschools](#)” in a September 12, 2007, article by Linda Jacobson.

[Early Learning Standards: Creating the Conditions for Success](#), a joint position statement of the National Association for the Education of Young Children and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education, addresses “the significant educational, ethical, developmental, programmatic, assessment, and policy issues related to early learning standards.”

Resources for Parents and Teachers of Young Children

[Pre-K Now’s Virtual Classroom](#) provides images of pre-K learning in progress.

## **Books**

[Beyond Bedtime Stories: A Parent’s Guide to Promoting Reading, Writing, and Other Literacy Skills from Birth to 5](#) by V. Susan Bennett-Armistead, Nell K. Duke, and Annie M. Moses

Taking a “literacy-throughout-the-day” approach, the authors organize the book around spaces in the home—the kitchen, bedroom, living room, and so forth—and suggest fun, stimulating activities for building children’s reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills in those spaces. Filled with tips, photos, milestones to watch for, and great ideas to try today.

[Literacy and the Youngest Learner: Best Practices for Educators of Children from Birth to 5](#) by V. Susan Bennett-Armistead, Nell K. Duke, Annie M. Moses

Research shows that literacy—the ability to read, write, listen, and speak—begins developing long before children enter elementary school. From there, it focuses on enjoyable and effective ways to build essential skills, such as oral language and phonemic awareness, and how to create dramatic play areas, books nooks, writing centers, and other literacy-rich spaces. Loaded with photographs, student work, and straight talk about kids and learning.

[Nurturing Knowledge: Building a Foundation for School Success by Linking Early Literacy to Math, Science, Art, and Social Studies](#) by Susan Neuman and Kathleen Roskos

The research is clear: the ability to read for understanding requires a great deal of knowledge and vocabulary, as well as reading skills. By linking early literacy to content area learning, we can provide children with the purposeful, knowledge-building experiences they need. In this practical resource, the authors share five essential early literacy practices—creating a supportive learning environment; shared book reading;

songs, rhymes, and word play; developmental writing; and play—and show how and why to apply them.

*[Breakthrough in Beginning Reading and Writing: The Evidence-Based Approach to Pinpointing Students' Needs and Delivering Targeted Instruction](#)* by J. Richard Gentry

Drawing on major new insights in brain research, Gentry shows how reading and writing develop in five phases—from operations with no letter knowledge to understanding of phonics chunks—that provide the blueprint for instructional approaches. The book enables teachers to identify a child's phase of development, set reasonable expectations for growth, and select the methods that will move each child forward. Includes 57-min. DVD.

### **Coming Soon from Scholastic Professional!**

*Transforming Literacy Practices in Preschool* by Lea McGee

*Look Who's Learning to Read* by Shelley Harwayne

### **Organizations That Advocate for Young Children and Pre-K Education**

- [Alliance for Childhood](#) promotes policies and practices that support children's healthy development, love of learning, and joy in living.
- [National Association for the Education of Young Children](#) is dedicated to improving the well-being of all young children, with particular focus on the quality of educational and developmental services for all children from birth through age 8.
- [National Institute for Early Education Research](#) supports early childhood education initiatives by providing objective, nonpartisan information based on research.
- [Pre-K Now](#) advocates high-quality, voluntary pre-kindergarten for all three- and four-year-olds.

For more resources to support teaching and learning, visit Scholastic Professional at <http://teacher.scholastic.com/products/scholasticprofessional/index.htm>.