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Vouching for Preschool: Using a School-Choice Voucher Program to Ensure Access to Universal Preschool Education for All U.S. Children

Despite studies finding that high-quality preschool education can improve student preparedness, increase graduation rates, decrease teen pregnancy, and reduce crime,¹ the United States does not guarantee all U.S. children universal access to a preschool education. Only fifty-one percent of three year olds and sixty-nine percent of four year olds are enrolled in a public or private preschool program in the United States.² In the 2011-2012 school year, publicly-funded preschool programs provided education for forty-one percent of four year olds and fourteen percent of three year olds.³ As compared to other industrialized countries, such as Japan and the United Kingdom, which enroll ninety-seven percent of four-year-olds in early childhood education programs,⁴ the enrollment for preschool-age children in the United States is significantly lower. A universal high-quality preschool program in the U.S. could expand access to nearly half of preschoolers whose families live below the 200 percent poverty line.⁵

This Article will propose that the United States federal government should provide funding to the states in order to facilitate a universal preschool-choice voucher program, as a

¹ W. STEVEN BARNETT, GETTING THE FACTS RIGHT ON PRE-K AND THE PRESIDENT'S PRE-K PROPOSAL 3 (2013) [hereinafter BARNETT, GETTING THE FACTS RIGHT]; Barack Obama, Remarks by the President on Early Childhood Education, Decatur, Ga. (Feb. 14, 2013), transcript *available at* <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/02/14/remarks-president-early-childhood-education-decatur-ga>.

² W. STEVEN BARNETT ET AL., THE STATE OF PRESCHOOL 2012, at 6 (2013) [hereinafter THE STATE OF PRESCHOOL 2012, <http://nieer.org/sites/nieer/files/yearbook2012.pdf>]; Travis Waldron, *Infographic: United States Lags Other Countries on Preschool, Investment, Enrollment* (May 2, 2013), <http://thinkprogress.org/education/2013/05/02/1953131/infographic-the-united-states-lags-other-countries-on-preschool-investment-enrollment/?mobile=nc>.

³ THE STATE OF PRESCHOOL 2012, *supra* note 2, at 6.

⁴ Waldron, *supra* note 2.

⁵ BARNETT, GETTING THE FACTS RIGHT, *supra* note 1, at 8.

means of improving access to high-quality preschool programs for all U.S. children between the ages of three and five. Part I of this article discusses the positive impact that early childhood education, particularly high-quality preschool, has on children in the short and long term. Part II of this Article explains a brief history of school-choice voucher programs in the United States, including a summary of the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris*. In particular, Part II of this Article includes an explanation of the Indiana school-choice voucher program, which was recently upheld as constitutional by the Indiana Supreme Court despite being the broadest school choice voucher program in the United States.⁶ Finally, this Article will recommend that the states should use the Indiana school-choice voucher program as a model for a preschool-choice voucher designed to guarantee that all U.S. children ages three to five can reap the benefits of a high-quality preschool program.

Part I: The Positive Impact of High-Quality Preschool Education

High-quality preschool programs offer academic, social, and emotional benefits for children from all socio-economic backgrounds.⁷ The Perry Preschool study, conducted in the 1960s, was one of the first and most comprehensive analyses evaluating preschool education's impact on children as the study participants were interviewed from preschool-age through age forty.⁸ This groundbreaking study found that "high quality preschool programs for young children living in poverty contribute to their intellectual and social development in childhood and

⁶ Stephanie Simon, *Indiana Court Upholds Broadest School Voucher Program*, U.S. NEWS, Mar. 26, 2013, http://usnews.nbcnews.com/_news/2013/03/26/17479214-indiana-court-upholds-broadest-school-voucher-program?lite.

⁷ Gregory Camilli et al., *Meta-Analysis of the Effects of Early Education Interventions on Cognitive and Social Development*, 112 TCHRS. C. REC. 579, 589 (2010).

⁸ Lawrence J. Schweinhart et al., *The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study Through Age 40: Summary, Conclusions, and Frequently Asked Questions 1, 5* (2005) (studying a sample of 123 children from low-income families in Ypsilanti, Mich., who were randomly assigned to either enroll at a high-quality preschool program or receive no preschool education. The high-quality preschool program employed teachers with bachelor's degrees and a certificate in education who taught daily two and a half hour classes to a group of five to six children and visited the children at their respective homes on a weekly basis).

their school successes, economic performance, and reduced commission of crime in adulthood.”⁹ Further studies have reaffirmed the positive results from the Perry Preschool study and suggested that the benefits of early childhood education are not limited to families living at or below the poverty level, but instead that high-quality preschool programs have a positive impact on all children¹⁰ by improving cognitive learning,¹¹ reducing placement in special education programs,¹² and fostering positive long-term attitudes about school.¹³

High-quality preschool programs help to close the academic achievement gap and improve school readiness.¹⁴ Before children even enter kindergarten, there is a significant achievement gap between children from high-income families and children living in low or middle-income families.¹⁵ For example, while approximately sixty percent of children in low-income families and more than a third of middle-income children do not know the alphabet prior to their first day of kindergarten,¹⁶ eighty-five percent of kindergarteners from affluent families are able to recognize the letters of the alphabet.¹⁷ A high-quality preschool program can reduce

⁹ Lawrence J. Schweinhart et al., *supra* note 8, at 1.

¹⁰ W. STEVEN BARNETT ET AL., ABBOTT PRESCHOOL PROGRAM LONGITUDINAL EFFECTS STUDY (APPLES): FIFTH GRADE FOLLOW-UP 7-8 (2013) [hereinafter BARNETT ET AL., ABBOTT PRESCHOOL PROGRAM LONGITUDINAL EFFECTS STUDY], <http://nieer.org/sites/nieer/files/APPLES%205th%20Grade.pdf>; BARNETT, GETTING THE FACTS RIGHT, *supra* note 1, at 4.

¹¹ See generally Camilli et al., *supra* note 7 (discussing a meta-analysis of data on preschool programs and finding that there were significant cognitive effects for children who attend an early childhood education program).

¹² Libby Dogget & Albert Wat, *Why PreK for All?*, KAPPAN MAG. 9 (2010); Wilson Greene, *Universal Preschool: A Costly but Worthy Goal*, 35 J.L. & EDUC. 555, 557 (2006) (explaining that high-quality preschool programs provide an earlier opportunity for teachers and parents to detect a student’s learning disability, and in turn, assure that the child is able to participate in an appropriate special education program).

¹³ Jon Lasser & Kathleen Fite, *Universal Preschool’s Promise: Success in Early Childhood and Beyond*, 39 EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUC. J. 169 (2011).

¹⁴ *Id.* at 170.

¹⁵ James E. Ryan, *A Constitutional Right to Preschool*, 94 CAL. L. REV. 49, 56 (2006); Dogget & Wat, *supra* note 12, at 11.

¹⁶ Dogget & Wat, *supra* note 12, at 9.

¹⁷ RICHARD J. COLEY, AN UNEVEN START: INDICATORS OF INEQUALITY IN SCHOOL READINESS 12 (2002), <http://www.ets.org/Media/Research/pdf/PICUNEVENSTART.pdf>.

this disparity.¹⁸ In Oklahoma, for example, middle-income children who enrolled in a high quality preschool program performed at higher levels in letter-word identification assessments and spelling as compared to children that did not participate in an early childhood education program.¹⁹ Universal access to preschool education would help ensure that children from all socioeconomic backgrounds are at the same starting line as they enter elementary school.

The educational benefits associated with enrollment in a high-quality preschool program continue as the child progresses through elementary, middle, and high school. When the prekindergarten curriculum recognizes the cognitive and emotional development needs for children ages three to five years old, an early childhood education can “establish a foundation for a lifelong love of learning,”²⁰ which influences the child’s educational career. Also, preschool programs that emphasize “small group learning and individualized teaching” could cut the achievement gap in half when comparing minority children and white children or low-income children to middle or high-income children through high school graduation.²¹ As the Perry Preschool study’s longitudinal results suggest, children who participate in a high-quality preschool program are more likely to graduate high school as compared to their peers who did not enroll in an early childhood education program.²² Also, results from the Abbott Study in New Jersey indicate that children who enrolled in one year of preschool were thirty percent less

¹⁸ Dogget & Wat, *supra* note 12, at 9; Schweinhart et al., *supra* note 8, at 1 (explaining that “the program group also outperformed the no-program group on various intellectual and language tests from their preschool years up to age 7; on school achievement tests at ages 9, 10, and 14; and on literacy tests at ages 19 and 27.”).

¹⁹ Dogget & Wat, *supra* note 12, at 9.

²⁰ Lasser & Fite, *supra* note 13, at 169.

²¹ BARNETT, GETTING THE FACTS RIGHT, *supra* note 1, at 2.

²² Schweinhart et al., *supra* note 8, at 1 (comparing Perry Preschool Study results that indicate seventy-seven percent of children who participated in the preschool program graduated high school while only sixty-percent of the no-program children graduated high school).

likely to repeat a grade and children who enrolled in two years of the high-quality preschool program were fifty percent less likely to repeat a grade.²³

In addition to the positive cognitive effects associated with a high-quality preschool education, children who are enrolled in early education programs have improved social development throughout their lifetime. Children who participate in a high-quality preschool program are more likely to be employed and earn higher median annual salaries.²⁴ High-quality preschool education also reduces an individual's likelihood for arrests.²⁵ Only thirty-six percent of the participants in the Perry Preschool study program group had five or more arrests, while fifty-five percent of the participants who did not receive a preschool education had been arrested five or more times by age forty.²⁶

Extensive research studies comparing students who have participated in a high-quality preschool program and those children who have not, indicate that the benefits to enrollment in a high-quality preschool program can impact a child's life long after the first day of kindergarten. Universal access to a high-quality preschool program would help to reduce the achievement gap between children in low to middle income families and children from high-income families, while also facilitating a successful transition to kindergarten. The results are clear that high-quality preschool programs improve children's cognitive effects and social development, and the next step is for the federal government and the states to consider innovative systems, such as a preschool-choice voucher program, which would be designed with the goal that a high-quality preschool program be available for all U.S. children ages three to five.

²³ Dogget & Wat, *supra* note 12, at 10. The Abbott Preschool program was implemented in response to a New Jersey Supreme Court decision. For more information about the Abbott high-quality preschool program, see generally BARNETT ET AL., ABBOTT PRESCHOOL PROGRAM LONGITUDINAL EFFECTS STUDY.

²⁴ Schweinhart et al., *supra* note 8, at 1-2.

²⁵ *Id.* at 3.

²⁶ *Id.*

Part II: School-Choice Voucher Programs

Since 1869 when Vermont initiated the first school voucher program in the United States, at least twelve states have implemented similar state-funded school voucher programs.²⁷ A school voucher program provides a family with a financial stipend to put toward the child's education at either a public or private school of the parent's choice.²⁸ When school vouchers were first suggested as a funding method for education in the United States, proponents asserted that the voucher system would increase competition between schools, resulting in higher quality schools.²⁹ However, opponents to school vouchers argued that because the school-choice voucher programs allowed families to use the public funds for private school tuition, the school-choice voucher system violated the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.³⁰

In *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris*, the U.S. Supreme Court evaluated whether the Ohio school voucher program, which provided low-income parents with a tutorial assistance or tuition assistance voucher to be used at public or private schools, was constitutional.³¹ The Ohio school-choice voucher program permitted parents to use vouchers at non-religious private schools, religious private schools, or public schools.³² However, no public schools chose to participate in

²⁷ *School Voucher Laws: State-by-State Comparison*, NAT'L CONF. ST. LEG., <http://www.ncsl.org/issues-research/educ/voucher-law-comparison.aspx> (last visited May 10, 2013); see also Patrick J. Wolf, *School Voucher Programs: What the Research Says About Parental School Choice*, 2008 B.Y.U. L. Rev. 415, 415-16 (2008) (discussing that the twelve voucher programs in the United States are targeted toward disadvantaged students and explaining that the Utah universal school-choice voucher program would have been the first voucher program that was available to all school-age children).

²⁸ See Mark Tushnet, *Vouchers After Zelman*, 2002 SUP. CT. REV. 1, 3 (2002); Jason S. Marks, *What Wall? School Vouchers and Church-State Separation After Zelman v. Simmons-Harris*, 58 J. MO. B. 354, 354 (2002).

²⁹ Hannah M. Rogers, *School Vouchers: A Solution to an Educational Crisis or Impermissible Government Involvement in Religion?*, 52 DRAKE L. REV. 821, 825 (2004).

³⁰ Rogers, *supra* note 28, at 831-32.

³¹ Tushnet, *supra* note 27, at 3-6. See generally Brad J. Davidson, Comment, *Balancing Parental Choice, State Interest, and the Establishment Clause: Constitutional Guidelines for States' School-Choice Legislation*, 33 TEX. TECH. L. REV. 435 (2002) (discussing the Supreme Court's jurisprudence on the Establishment Clause before reaching the decision in *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris*).

³² James Forman, Jr., *The Rise and Fall of School Vouchers: A Story of Religion, Race, and Politics*, 54 UCLA L. REV. 547, 548 (2007).

the program, which resulted in most of the publicly funded vouchers being used for a child's tuition at a religious private school.³³

In ruling on the constitutionality of the school voucher program, the U.S. Supreme Court created a clear line between “programs of true private choice, in which government aid reaches religious schools only as a result of the genuine and independent choices of private individuals” and programs that provide direct financial aid to religious schools.³⁴ The U.S. Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the school voucher program in Ohio, reasoning that the program allowed for true private choice because the families who were eligible for vouchers had a range of options between nonreligious and religious schools.³⁵ Furthermore, “because the Ohio program gives the tuition scholarships directly to parents of eligible students on a neutral basis, and these same parents alone choose where to spend these tuition scholarships, the fact that secretarian schools indirectly benefit from these parental choices” was not violative of the Establishment Clause.³⁶

Although the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris* found that school-choice voucher programs are constitutional as long as the voucher program involves true private choice and is neutrally structured to provide direct aid to private and public schools,³⁷ there are still several opponents that criticize these school-choice voucher programs as violating the Establishment Clause³⁸ and diverting valuable funding away from public schools.³⁹ After the *Zelman* decisions, proponents of vouchers expected that voucher programs would quickly

³³ Forman, *supra* note 31, at 549.

³⁴ *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris*, 536 U.S. 639, 649 (2002); Rogers, *supra* note 28, at 836.

³⁵ *Zelman*, 536 U.S. at 662.

³⁶ Marks, *supra* note 27, at 356.

³⁷ *Zelman*, 536 U.S. at 662.

³⁸ Rogers, *supra* note 28, at 837-44.

³⁹ Dana Eberle-Peay, *The Federal Constitution Versus a State Constitution: Revisiting Zelman v. Simmons-Harris in Indiana*, 41 J.L. & EDUC. 709, 714-15 (2012).

expand across the states.⁴⁰ However, as a result of opposition, five years after the Supreme Court's decision in *Zelman v. Harris*, only seven states had implemented a voucher program and most of the programs were only applicable for a specific group of identified students.⁴¹

Despite the political opposition to voucher programs, studies have demonstrated that school-choice voucher programs have a positive effect on the parent's satisfaction with the schools, particularly in the areas of "curriculum, safety, parent-teacher relations, [and] academics . . ."⁴² In addition to increased parental satisfaction, school voucher programs improve the child's academic achievement level.⁴³ Evidence also suggests that voucher programs create more racially and socio-economically integrated school settings, which enhance the learning environment for children.⁴⁴ A universal preschool-choice voucher program could combine these benefits of voucher programs with the positive outcomes related to high-quality preschool education to produce a program whereby parents feel satisfied with their choice of preschool while children are provided the opportunity to enjoy the academic and social benefits associated with high-quality preschool instruction.

In 2013, the Indiana school-choice voucher program became the broadest school voucher program in the United States because the program provides public funds to both low-income and middle-income families to help pay for school tuition.⁴⁵ The voluntary Indiana school-choice voucher program allows the parents of eligible students to choose the program-eligible school.⁴⁶ Unlike previous voucher programs, the Indiana school-choice voucher program is not limited to

⁴⁰ Gia Fonte, *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris: Authorizing School Vouchers, Education's Winning Lottery Ticket*, 34 LOY. U. CHI. L.J. 479, 554 (2003).

⁴¹ Wolf, *supra* note 26, at 419.

⁴² Wolf, *supra* note 26, at 434-35.

⁴³ Marks, *supra* note 27, at 437-38 (discussing results from ten random assignment studies that evaluated the educational impact of school-choice vouchers on a child's reading and math scores).

⁴⁴ Fonte, *supra* note 39, at 558.

⁴⁵ Simon, *supra* note 6.

⁴⁶ *Meredith v. Pence*, 984 N.E.2d 1213, 1218 (Ind. 2013).

a certain population of disadvantaged students, but instead offers the school-choice voucher to students from middle-income to low-income families.⁴⁷ For example, a family of four with an annual household income of \$64,000 is eligible for a \$4,500 voucher for each child,⁴⁸ thus expanding the number of children that can participate in the voucher program. In the 2012-2013 school year, more than 9,000 children used the school vouchers to pay for school tuition, which marks a 140 percent increase from the first year the voucher program was available to families.⁴⁹

The Indiana Supreme Court justices, in *Meredith v. Pence*, unanimously held that the Indiana voucher program is constitutional and reasoned that the state “is serving valid educational purposes by both maintaining a public school system and providing options beyond it.”⁵⁰ Following similar reasoning from the U.S. Supreme Court cases, the high state court stated that the voucher program did not establish religion because under the program, the parents, and not the state, chose where to use the tuition vouchers.⁵¹ Specifically, the Indiana Supreme Court reasoned, “the principal actors and direct beneficiaries under the voucher program are neither the State nor program-eligible schools, but lower-income Indiana families with school-age children.”⁵² In finding that the Indiana school voucher program, despite its breadth of eligibility, did not violate the state or federal constitution, the Indiana Supreme Court helped to pave the way for other state legislatures to use Indiana’s broad voucher program as a model when formulating similar education programs.

⁴⁷ Simon, *supra* note 6.

⁴⁸ *Id.*

⁴⁹ *Id.*; Mark Guarino, *Indiana’s Expansive School Voucher Program Upheld: A Model for Others?*, Christian Science Monitor, Mar. 26, 2013, <http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Education/2013/0326/Indiana-s-expansive-school-voucher-program-upheld-A-model-for-others>.

⁵⁰ Michael Gerson, Opinion, *In Indiana, a Big Win for School Choice*, WASH. POST, Apr. 1, 2013, http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2013-04-01/opinions/38187793_1_school-choice-voucher-programs-scholarship-program.

⁵¹ Gerson, *supra* note 49; Simon, *supra* note 6.

⁵² *Meredith v. Pence*, 984 N.E.2d 1213, 1228 (Ind. 2013).

Part III: Using a School-Choice Voucher Program for High-Quality Preschool Education

When implementing a universal preschool-choice voucher program, state legislatures should consider the Indiana school-choice voucher as a model program. Indiana's school-choice voucher program that impacts both low and middle-income students is a useful example of a statewide school-choice voucher system that operates within the bounds of constitutionality, while also expanding the eligibility for the voucher. Furthermore, to incentivize the public or private preschool programs within the state to provide children with a high-quality preschool education, the state governments should require preschool programs to meet specified high-quality standards before being able to participate in the preschool-choice voucher program. Thus, the universal preschool-choice voucher program should offer clear, yet flexible standards for curriculum development,⁵³ involve true private choice, and be accessible to all students on a graduated scale.

Before creating a nationwide plan to implement high-quality preschool programs, the federal government must identify concrete uniform standards that high-quality preschool programs must achieve to be eligible for receipt of vouchers. While it may be difficult to neatly discern a specific formula to create a high-quality preschool program because the program should also be tailored to the needs of the students, the National Institute for Early Childhood Education Research has developed ten quality standard benchmarks that serve as a helpful guide for defining a high-quality preschool program.⁵⁴ The NIEER's research-supported standards evaluate the state's preschool program policy based on factors, such as the required credentials for preschool teachers, the number of students in the classes, teacher-student ratios, the emphasis placed on comprehensive early learning standards, and the support services offered to the

⁵³ Forman, *supra* note 31, at 588-89.

⁵⁴ THE STATE OF PRESCHOOL 2012, *supra* note 2.

children and parents through the program.⁵⁵ The New Jersey Abbott high-quality preschool program also includes a specific list of standards, requiring “a maximum class size of 15, teachers with certification in early childhood education, assistant teachers in every classroom, support services for children and families, and a developmentally appropriate curriculum that fully addresses the state’s learning standards.”⁵⁶

In addition to providing a base level of achievement for each school, the state-imposed standards should also reflect the flexibility for preschool programs to tailor their curriculum to meet the needs of the children in the community.⁵⁷ High-quality early childhood education often involves “age-appropriate, nurturing, play-based instruction,”⁵⁸ which is not as easily confined to a measurable standard. Further, depending on the community of students, the preschool program might also consider emphasizing cultural diversity in its standards because “cultural diversity in early childhood education promotes respect for others and establishes the school as both familiar and accepting.”⁵⁹ Using the NIEER and Abbott preschool program standards as a guide, but also providing opportunities for preschool programs to create innovative curriculum, the state government should make a public or private school’s eligibility to participate in the voucher program, contingent upon whether the program has matched minimum quality standards.

Further, when creating a school-voucher program, it is important to consider that “the key to obtaining constitutional approval in voucher programs revolves around the power of a private

⁵⁵ THE STATE OF PRESCHOOL 2012, *supra* note 2, at 24-25. The NIEER’s ten standards evaluate whether the program: (1) requires a Bachelor’s Degree for teachers; (2) requires that teachers are specialized in preschool education; (3) necessitates that assistant teachers have a Child Development Associate; (4) obligates teachers to engage in in-service training for a minimum of 15 hours annually; (5) places a limit on class sizes and teacher-student ratios; (6) includes early learning standards designed to target social development, general knowledge, and motor development; (7) offers at least one meal to each student; (8) provides support services such as health screenings or parent conferences; (10) is monitored by the state through a site visit to ensure that the quality measures are being met. *Id.*

⁵⁶ BARNETT ET AL., ABBOTT PRESCHOOL PROGRAM LONGITUDINAL EFFECTS STUDY, *supra* note 9, at 3-4.

⁵⁷ *Id.* at 4; W. STEVEN BARNETT ET AL., THE UNIVERSAL VS. TARGETED DEBATE: SHOULD THE UNITED STATES HAVE PRESCHOOL FOR ALL? <http://nieer.org/resources/factsheets/6.pdf>.

⁵⁸ Lasser & Fite, *supra* note 13, at 170.

⁵⁹ *Id.*

individual to determine which schools government aid flows to, rather than the government directing the funds specifically to religious schools.”⁶⁰ Under the Indiana school-choice voucher program, the school voucher is distributed to the eligible individual and the eligible individual or the eligible individual’s parent and the eligible school the child attends must endorse the distribution.⁶¹ Similarly, the preschool-choice voucher program should be designed to distribute the tuition aid directly to the parents, who can then put the voucher toward tuition at a high-quality preschool program.⁶² Also, akin to the Indiana school-choice voucher program, the state statute for the preschool-choice voucher program should provide that a large range of both public and private nonsecular and secular schools may participate in the voucher program.⁶³

To guarantee that states move toward a universal high-quality preschool education program, the preschool-choice vouchers must be made available to all children because a high-quality preschool program improves academic achievement and social development for all children, regardless of their socioeconomic status. While each child should be able to attain a voucher, the amount of the voucher could be based on a graduated scale taking into account several different factors, such as the household income level or whether the child has a learning disability.⁶⁴ In Indiana, for example, each eligible student receives a school-choice voucher in an amount that is dependent on the families’ annual household income.⁶⁵ When implementing a universal preschool-choice voucher program, legislatures should consider the graduated scale as

⁶⁰ Rogers, *supra* note 28, at 838.

⁶¹ IND. CODE ANN. § 20-51-4-10 (West 2013).

⁶² Davidson, *supra* note 30, at 485.

⁶³ Davidson, *supra* note 30, at 484-85

⁶⁴ *The Case for Vouchers*, PBS: FRONTLINE, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/vouchers/choice/provouchers.html> (last visited May 13, 2013).

⁶⁵ IND. CODE ANN. § 20-51-4-4 (West 2013).

a means of distributing the vouchers to reflect the needs of particularly disadvantaged children, while also ensuring that each child in the state is eligible for a preschool-choice voucher.

Conclusion

Studies on high-quality preschool programs clearly demonstrate early childhood education programs allow children to be on a level playing field with their peers. In addition to increasing school preparedness and reducing the academic achievement gap, high-quality preschool programs have a long-term impact on a child's social development. To improve access to high-quality preschool programs for children ages three to five in the United States, the federal government should provide funding to the states in order to facilitate a universal preschool-choice voucher program.

In determining an efficient and constitutional method for implementing universal high-quality preschool education, legislators should consider using the model of a school-choice voucher system. To be most effective, the innovative preschool-choice voucher system should involve true private choice, define particular high-quality preschool standards, and be available to all U.S. children between the ages of three and five. A universal preschool-choice voucher program is the next step to help American preschool-age children join their global peers at the starting line.