

STRENGTHEN YOUNG CHILDREN'S LEARNING

Until recently, Illinois had been a leader in strengthening early opportunities through state-funded preschool programs, but the state fiscal crisis has produced harmful cuts in essential investments.

Continue to Reverse Harmful Cuts, Retain Federal Help with a \$75 million Increase in FY17

As part of its FY17 budget request, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) has asked to increase the Early Childhood Block Grant (ECBG) by \$75 million. **According to ISBE, this funding would allow more than 9,000 additional children, from birth to age 5, to receive needed services.** It would also fulfill the state's commitment to the federal government as part of the Preschool Expansion Grant that is helping thousands of young children in communities of need statewide; without such a state-funding boost, Illinois risks losing that critical federal help. **We support ISBE's FY17 funding request.**

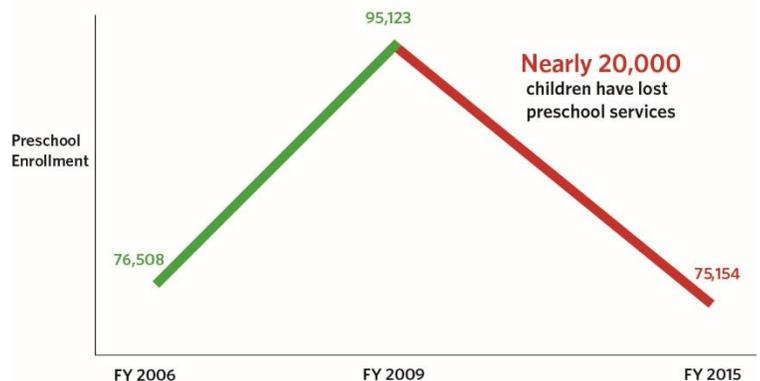
The Effects of Funding Cuts to the Early Childhood Block Grant (ECBG)

Investing in the learning and development of young, at-risk children is now more critical than ever. The ECBG funds preschool programs for 3- and 4-year-olds as well as child development services for at-risk infants and toddlers. Illinois' "Preschool for All" (PFA) law prioritizes enrollment of those who are low-income or otherwise at-risk of academic failure.

The FY16 education budget included a \$20.8 million increase in the ECBG, its first new funding since deep cuts began in FY09. **Still more must be done to help thousands of young children in need of services.**

- **About 20,000 children have lost access to preschool over the last seven years.**
- We haven't served fewer children in state-funded preschool in a decade.
- Even before the cuts, many families were unable to find or afford a quality program.

Losing Ground in Preschool for All



The Benefits of Preschool

Too many children in Illinois face significant hurdles to kindergarten readiness. More than 41% of those under the age of 5 live in low-income households, and the number of children living in extreme poverty continues to swell. The rate of preschool-aged kids experiencing homelessness grows at an alarming pace, and data show that our youngest children are the ones most likely to come into contact with the child welfare system.

The research is clear: High-quality early care and education programs work for children and families. ISBE reports that preschool helps students make short- and long-term academic gains; former PFA students maintained previous academic gains in grades 4 through 8 and performed well on standardized tests. In kindergarten through third grade, students from at-risk backgrounds who attended state-supported pre-K programs performed above average or average in core subject areas.

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