



## **NIEER's Advocating for High-Quality Preschool: Guide to Support Pre-K Expansion**

### *Summary*

This brief from The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) provides information and guidance for advocates and other stakeholders as they seek to increase investments in high-quality preschool in their states. [Read NIEER's Full Policy Brief.](#)

While state leaders are responsible for administering and ensuring the implementation of Early Learning programs, advocates have a role to support policies that can improve access and enhance quality. When advocates and state leaders work together to develop policy priorities they are often more successful at achieving wins in preschool quality and expansion. One strategy that has been effective in some states is by establishing time for the advocates and state leaders to meet and plan prior to the budget cycle.

### **Four Tips for Success in Advocacy**

#### 1) Pairing State Data with Compelling Stories

- It is important to use data on the current status of Early Learning within the state and to share “real-time” stories about the benefits of high-quality preschool with your audience. Stories that emotionally engage an audience, coupled with clear data, enable you to make a compelling call to action.
  - Offer local data to show legislators how this program would impact their constituents. The Advocates for Children of New Jersey analyzed the number of eligible 3- and 4-year olds by legislative district. They included all children who did not have access to the state's high quality preschool program due to their district not applying for funds.
  - Share real life stories of children who gained new vocabulary, social emotional skills, or academic skills needed for Kindergarten.
  - Share anecdotes from Kindergarten teachers about how they see the difference with students who attended high-quality preschool.
  - Conduct a fiscal map or cost study.
  - Survey families and constituents regarding support for high-quality Pre-K.
  - Conduct an independent evaluation of the state-funded Pre-K program to demonstrate effectiveness and justify increased investment.
  - Access national datasets such as NIEER State of Preschool and Center for the Study of Childcare Employment Workforce Index to demonstrate comparisons with other states.

#### 2) Use Research to Target the “Ask”

- Framing your advocacy message to focus on the benefits of high quality and the value for children and families is most effective in crafting your “ask”.
- One of the challenges for advocates when advocating for quality is that, while policymakers agree that it is important, they have a hard time translating that to funding (unlike slots or seats). This is where the use of one or multiple cost modeling tools may be helpful.

### 3) Identifying the “Ask”

- Based on state data collected, there are several questions that address access, quality, and services that will help form the “ask” when identifying the state’s preschool needs:
  - What is your time frame for expanding?
  - Are you targeting enrollment or going for “universal” access?
  - Are you advocating to improve the quality of the current Pre-K program?
  - How many hours per day? Days per week? Weeks per year?
  - What services will the program provide?
  - What is the distribution of where Pre-K programs will be located? How can you promote a diverse delivery strategy?

### 4) Communicating the “Ask”

- Talk about benefits and value, not cost.
- Use the phrase “high-quality preschool” or “high-quality Early Learning”.
- Use science to explain why Early Learning is so important.