



Innovation Spotlight: Universal Pre-K in Dayton, OH

Over the next few months, Joint Economic Committee Democrats will highlight cutting-edge policy solutions that empower small towns, small cities, and rural communities across the nation.

Problem: For America’s next generation of leaders, high-quality early learning prepares children for kindergarten and increases their college attendance, future earnings, and employment. Yet, over half of all preschool-aged children are not enrolled in formal education.

Background: In 2014, during her first year in office, Mayor Nan Whaley launched the Dayton “City of Learners” program to promote student achievement and build a stronger local workforce. The City of Learners Committee, comprised of more than 70 community leaders, hosted listening sessions with private and public schools, business owners, and nonprofit advocates to gather ideas on how to improve local educational outcomes. A 2015 report summarized some of the major issues: one-third of Dayton’s children are not in preschool at all, and close to half who do attend are not in programs that are providing what they need.¹



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Solution: After almost two years of community organizing and planning, Dayton citizens approved an income tax increase of 0.25 percent in 2016 that provides more than \$4 million a year to expand pre-school access to every Dayton 4-year-old.² That would more than double the number of 4-year-olds with access to nearly 2,000 students. In addition, the city will complement universal pre-K with other initiatives, including after-school and summer learning programs and increased mentorship.

Looking Ahead: Universal pre-K generates significant benefits for *all* Americans: each dollar spent on early learning and care generates \$7.30 of benefits to society.³ Head Start, a federal program that provides early education and social services, has been extremely successful in providing financially insecure children with key resources. However, the program lacks enough funding to even fully meet the needs of students under the poverty line, leaving behind 1.7 million children.⁴ Congress should work to increase Head Start funding so more families can access comprehensive early learning services.

¹ <https://www.daytonohio.gov/ArchiveCenter/ViewFile/Item/48>

² <http://www.mydaytondailynews.com/news/whaley-dayton-preschool-effort-success-work-toughest/5YMc3q8YFAognfKdBRAUyN/>

³ https://www.jec.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/9654af63-e1a8-4bbe-8291-6b22105ac985/high-quality-early-learning-and-care.pdf

⁴ https://www.jec.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/9654af63-e1a8-4bbe-8291-6b22105ac985/high-quality-early-learning-and-care.pdf