

BOMBING SUSPECTS' MOM IN TERRORISM FILES

Added to federal terrorism database about 18 months before deadly attack. [Page A6]



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How did Bengals do in 2013 draft? Look inside

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OHIO

Pre-K education on front burner

IN OUR SCHOOLS

Funding is the key to increased participation, but there is no agreement on whether it is worth the cost



Teacher Sherry Bell, left, listens to Unique James, 3, talk about the book that Bell read to a preschool class. THE ENQUIRER/CARA OWSLEY



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AVONDALE — A group of 3- and 4-year-olds surrounded preschool teacher Sherry Bell, transfixed by the story she read about a gingerbread man and his adventure at school.

“We want you to stay,” Bell read. “Please don’t go —”

“Away!” the kids finished her sentence.

“Good!” said Bell. “We’re looking

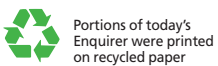
for rhyming words. Now, could this happen in real life?”

“No,” the class answered. She asked one boy to explain. “Because he was cookie,” he said.

Bell wasn’t just reading a book, she was teaching the 23 preschool students at Church of the Living God in Avondale vocabulary and problem-solving skills — things they’ll need to be ready for kindergarten next year.

She knows how important kindergarten readiness is for children within her class’ demographic. Most live in the inner-city neighborhood and are from lower-income families. Statistically, that means they’re more likely to start kindergarten behind their peers academically and drop out if they can’t catch up.

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WEATHER
High: 65°
Low: 52°

Experience
the longest known insect migration on Earth.
#MonarchMania

Flight of the Butterflies

Cincinnati Museum Center
OMNIMAX

COVER STORY



VIDEO: See inside a preschool classroom and judge for yourself.

Examining the value of preschool education

Continued from Page A1

That's why she decided to teach preschool. "I wanted to see it at this level, where foundations are made," she said.

Bell believes a quality preschool — hers is in the process of getting a three-star rating, the highest available in Ohio — makes a big difference in children's future success. She's not alone.

Preschool isn't mandatory, meaning parents who want it must pay for it or, for low-income families, apply for a limited amount of public subsidies. But the calls to expand children's access to preschool — specifically, high-quality preschool — are reaching a deafening pitch.

Consider:

» President Barack Obama sung the praises of universal preschool in his State of the Union address and included \$75 billion in his federal budget proposal for what's now dubbed his "Preschool for All" plan.

» Ohio Governor John Kasich's proposed a budget that added funding for preschool special education and for high-performing early childhood education programs.

» Several local groups have teamed up on a "Preschool Promise" initiative in Cincinnati, with hopes to expand to Northern Kentucky. They're trying to raise \$6 million-\$9 million a year for vouchers to place 1,000 more kids annually in "quality" preschools.

» Kentucky has sought to expand access for years. Gov. Steve Beshear launched a task force in 2009 to emphasize quality early childhood education. But a recent budget shortfall forced drastic cuts to Kentucky's Child Care Assistance program. The state froze applications for subsidies April 1. On July 1 it will reduce the eligibility level for families qualifying for subsidies from 150 percent of the federal poverty level to 100 percent. Many groups are lobbying to have them reinstated.

It's clear preschool is on the front burner of national and local education agendas. But will the rallying and funding ultimately make a difference for our kids and our communities?

Where we stand now

The idea of universal preschool, like many education initiatives and reform ideas, is not new. It has come up a handful of times in the past several decades. The federally funded Head Start program, which serves low-income families, was born from such an initiative — two years after Lyndon B. Johnson declared a war on poverty in his State of the Union speech. Funding and quality are generally the biggest areas of concern when plans arise to expand access. There's also the debate about whether



Four-year-old Debbie Sanders takes a look at a book her teacher, Sherry Bell, read to a preschool class. THE ENQUIRER/CARA OWSLEY

the learning sticks.

The funding argument:

Finances often stymie efforts to expand preschool access. Obama's Preschool for All plan would levy a cigarette tax to funnel \$75 billion over 10 years to states to help more low- and middle-income families access high-quality preschools. His plan isn't actually "universal." It's

capped at families making up to 200 percent of the federal poverty level, or \$47,100 for a family of four.

The Cincinnati Preschool Promise would seek to raise a mix of public and private dollars. It would also serve low- and middle-class families on a sliding scale. The exact parameters are still being worked out.

» **The argument for: Preschool saves money down the road.**

The U.S. Department of Education, citing a Chicago study, says every \$1 spent on high-quality preschool saves \$7 down the road in societal costs. According to the Strive Partnership, preschool's price at roughly \$7,000 a child is a bargain compared to the \$13,000 it can cost on remediation for a child who arrives at kindergarten unprepared.

Preschool advocates cite statistics

COVER STORY



A kindergarten student, left, and a preschool student work on an activity at Riverview East Academy. THE ENQUIRER/CARA OWLSLEY

for how preschool impacts the rest of the child's life. Students who aren't prepared for kindergarten are less likely to read at grade-level by third grade. Those who don't achieve that milestone, proponents say, are four times more likely to drop out. And dropouts are more likely to be on public assistance and tangled in the criminal justice system. Taxpayers foot the bill.

"Preschool sets the stage for academic development for the rest of their lives," said Ennis Tait, pastor of Church of the Living God, which runs the two-star preschool in Avondale. "Preschool sets the stage for academic development for the rest of their lives."

» **The argument against: Universal preschool is too expensive.**

Preschool costs an average of \$167 a week in Ohio and \$145 in Kentucky. That can be steep for middle class families and unreachable for those with low incomes. Universal, quality preschool sounds great, but critics say it costs too much and spreads resources too thin to help the children who really need it – those from the poorest families.

"It's like saying 'wouldn't it be great if everyone had a Mercedes?'" said Grover Whitehurst, head of the Brown Center on Education Policy at the Washington D.C.-based Brookings Institution. "Sure, it'd be great, but what if you already have a pretty good car?"

Middle class families, he said, are more likely to be able to pay for preschool or to teach those kindergarten-readiness skills at home – vocabulary words, numbers, how to hold a crayon. He said the money should be focused on the poor.

"Evidence is that pre-K has the largest impact on economically disadvantaged families and families where parents aren't educated," he said.

AVERAGE COST

Average weekly cost of full-time care for a preschool-age child, 3 to 4 years old.

OHIO

| | |
|----------------|--------|
| Butler | 160.88 |
| Clermont | 156.49 |
| Hamilton | 167.79 |
| Warren | 178.60 |

Ohio Average166.67

KENTUCKY

| | |
|----------------|--------|
| Boone | 152.44 |
| Campbell | 143.44 |
| Grant | 120.00 |
| Kenton | 143.98 |

Kentucky Average144.99

Source: 4C for Children

"Middle class kids get lots of rich interaction at home. Most (children) would be better off spending more time with their parent than in a setting where they're sharing an adult with 15 or 20 other children."

The quality argument.

Experts say quality is critically important in preschool effectiveness. Yet the quality of preschools across the country varies widely. Fewer than one third of 4-year-olds in poverty attend high-quality preschools, according to the U.S. Department of Education. Quality is usually determined based on class size, curriculum and the qualifications of the teachers. Many states, including Ohio and Kentucky and Indiana, participate in state-wide rating quality rating systems.

» **The argument for: Universal preschool raises the bar on quality.**

The Preschool for All plan invests an additional \$750 million in states to build the capacity of quality pre-

schools, which could pay for everything from teacher training to higher teacher salaries.

"Some people pay more to park their car than a teacher is paid for their work," Deb Delisle, assistant secretary for elementary and secondary education for the U.S. Department of Education, said recently. Locally, private groups help where they can. Cincinnati's Duke Energy Children's Museum recently won a national award, for providing grant-funded science training to early childhood education teachers in Greater Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky. The Museum Center says kindergarten-readiness test scores of those students in the program increased.

Many of the local quality programs have capacity to serve more kids, but not enough families have the subsidies or can afford the tuition.

April Hayes, director of Children Inc.'s Newport Preschool Center, said the difference between quality and non-quality preschool is stark. Only 10 percent of students who haven't had quality preschool come to kindergarten prepared, according to local test scores, she said.

» **The argument against: It will be too hard to ramp it up and make sure these preschools are really "high-quality."**

Ohio and Kentucky's preschool-rating systems are voluntary, meaning preschools don't have to participate. In fact, only 30 percent of Hamilton County providers participate, according to Success By 6. In Boone, Kenton and Campbell counties, about half participate.

Even some of the current preschools that get public money haven't lived up to expectations. A December study found that the largest of them, the federally funded Head Start pro-

gram, showed no lasting impact.

"From a policy perspective, the core issue is the quality of it," said Emmy Partin, director of policy and research for the Fordham Institute, an education policy think tank.

"If we were having a good discussion about putting in place high-quality programs especially for neediest kids, we'd be totally supportive. What you have in a lot of cases is babysitting. Glorified day care. That's separate debate."

The effectiveness argument: Does it work?

Debate also revolve around the whether preschool actually works.

» **The argument against: preschool doesn't have a lasting impact**

Studies show 90 percent of a child's brain develops by age 5 so advocates say it's imperative to start educating them early.

But a long-term study of the federal Head Start program found in December that the impact doesn't last.

There was no evidence it improved school readiness, and ultimately, those children were doing no better in third grade than children from similar income brackets who didn't attend Head Start.

The study provided fodder to arguments against universal preschool.

» **The argument for: Other studies show preschool does work.**

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said the Head Start study "isn't a great comparison to the president's proposal."

In an April 18 guest column in the Washington Post, he said about 20 percent of Head Start participants never attended. He said the Preschool for All plan would require higher teacher qualifications than Head Start and that the administration would add "needed quality-control" to Head Start.

He cited several other studies, including one in Tulsa, Okla., and studies from the 1960s and '70s showing preschool did have an impact. The kids who attended quality preschool were less likely to be held back or placed in special education. ■

WHERE CAN I GET HELP PICKING A PRESCHOOL?

» Kentucky and Ohio both have voluntary rating systems that judge quality of preschools and other child care providers based on things like class size or teacher qualifications. Kentucky's is called the "STARS for KIDS NOW" program. Ohio's is called the "Step Up to Quality" program. Indiana's is called Paths to Quality.

» 4C for Children maintains a database for southwest Ohio and Northern Kentucky which help parents search for programs based on several things, including their star-rating. To search for preschools visit <http://www.4cforchildren.org/parents/ps.html> or call 4C at 513-758-1330 in Southwest Ohio or 859-781-3511, x1330 in Northern Kentucky. (Source, 4C for Children - <http://www.4cforchildren.org/>)