

# Idaho School Readiness Act

Did you know that 90% of brain development occurs before age 5? Research shows that a child's earliest experiences set the foundation for a lifetime of success. It's crucial that parents have the tools and resources they need to support children with stable, nurturing environments in their earliest years. Strong families are the building blocks of a strong society. This idea is at the core of the Idaho School Readiness Act.

Data shows that only 51% of Idaho's students have the foundational skills they need when they enter kindergarten. The percentage of children starting off behind is substantially higher among low-income families. Those not ready to learn will have great difficulty ever catching up with their peers. They won't be able to read proficiently by third grade, setting into motion a cascade of compounding issues that ultimately increase the chances that they will drop out of school, make it a near-certainty that they will not go on to post-secondary, and increase the likelihood that they will end up on social services or in the criminal justice system.

According to a recent statewide poll, 76% of voters and 80% of parents with young children support state funding for preschool opportunities. Yet Idaho is one of only six states that invests no money to improve the access or affordability of high-quality pre-K options for Idaho families.

No challenge is insurmountable to Idahoans, though. Created through a partnership of Idaho AEYC, parents, lawmakers, the business community and others, the Idaho School Readiness Act aims to target early education in a way that is innovative and uniquely Idahoan. It harnesses the power of local communities and parental choice in a way that's accountable for success and makes the most of existing systems.

## The Idaho School Readiness Act contains several provisions that fit Idaho:

- It is designed to provide voluntary resources to parents with young children.
- Parents can choose in-home or out-of-home options.
- Local communities have a financial stake and control the program.
- The state plays a supportive role to stabilize the programs.
- All programs are accountable – effectiveness is objectively measured.

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## Out-of-Home School Readiness Option

- For off-site programs, Idaho would play two roles. First, the State Board of Education would establish the guidelines that define a “high-quality” school readiness program and are aligned with Idaho’s Early Learning Guidelines. Second, the Legislature would provide 50% of the funding for students enrolled in off-site school readiness programs.
- Local communities would create collaboratives that would be responsible for coming up with the other 50% of the funding and targeting the local programs that will be funded. Collaboratives could include the local school district, charter schools, high-quality child care programs, businesses, United Ways, local YMCAs, Rotary Clubs, other civic organizations and foundations. Any group that wants to be part of the solution and has resources to offer can belong to the community collaborative.
- Each collaborative would select a “lead partner” that would administer the project and apply to the state for matching funding. Once approved for funding by the state, the local collaborative would decide which program or programs in the community meet the defined high-quality standards and provide funding for seats in the program.
- Priority placement would be given to 4-year-olds who come from low-income families or communities that historically have low kindergarten readiness scores.
- Local school districts, charter schools, for-profit and nonprofit programs could all qualify to become school readiness providers in the local community and receive state and local funding by meeting the high-quality standards set by the State Board of Education.

## In-Home School Readiness Option

- The Idaho School Readiness Act would provide state funding in two ways for parents. First, the state would contract with a provider to offer age-appropriate materials to help parents prepare their children for school. Second, the state would fund a home-visit program to equip families at home with knowledge and resources to prepare their children for school.
- The Idaho School Readiness Act contains an “accountability” provision. Any parent who agrees to accept state money must agree to have their child screened for reading readiness *whether or not* they are enrolled in kindergarten. The effectiveness of both off-site and at-home programs would be measured by whether students are ready to learn based on Idaho’s current kindergarten readiness assessment.