



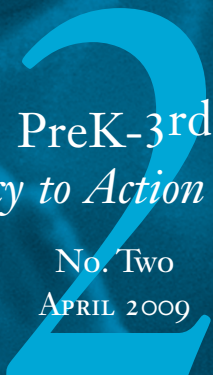
FOUNDATION *for*  
CHILD DEVELOPMENT

# PreK-3<sup>rd</sup>: What is the Price Tag?

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PreK-3<sup>rd</sup>  
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## **PreK-3<sup>rd</sup>: What is the Price Tag?**

In an era of intense fiscal pressures, educators are focusing on those investments most likely to lift student achievement. They are also trying to make more strategic use of existing resources. To achieve these goals, a growing number of policymakers are considering integrated PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> approaches. Increasingly, they are recognizing that the first several years of classroom experience lay the groundwork for later learning.

Policymakers are also realizing that despite Americans' widespread confidence in their local elementary schools, primary-grade education is not nearly good enough. For many, the wake-up call comes when they are confronted with Fourth-Grade results on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) that are disappointing overall, and devastating with respect to Black and Latino children. They realize that a problem this deep and widespread must develop over time.

Decisionmakers are also coming to grips with the research showing that Prekindergarten investments alone cannot guarantee a solid foundation for learning. Without systematic follow-up, including high-quality, full-school-day Kindergarten and primary-grade programs, the positive results of PreK initiatives fade over time.

For all of these reasons, a coherent approach to strengthening the first six years of school (PreK for three- and four-year-olds, Kindergarten, and Grades One through Three) makes good sense. But what is the price tag? This Policy to Action Brief offers a framework for estimating costs, based on the specific needs and priorities of your students, parents, and community leaders.

Flexibility is key. (See “No Size Fits All.”) In the pages that follow, we “unpack” the PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> concept, describing each core element and outlining a set of steps or decisions needed to cost out each one.

## Who Can Use the Framework?

PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> can strengthen teaching and learning in a state, a district, or school. Decisionmakers working in any of these settings can use the framework presented here. And, as this and future Briefs will show, educators in all of these settings have put PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> to work, with promising results.

### No Size Fits All

As they cost out PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> initiatives, state and district policymakers will select different elements – and different numbers of elements – geared to their children’s needs and strengths as well as parents’ and community leaders’ priorities and values.

The cost estimation framework on the following page starts with the four principles that are the “non-negotiables” of the PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> approach.

- Voluntary, full-school-day PreK for three- and four-year-olds and mandatory full-school-day Kindergarten
- High-impact supports, beyond mandates, across grades
- Aligned educational strategies and resources within and across grades
- Consistent personnel policies

The model that is constructed on these four building blocks can and will vary significantly. Case in point: Some states or districts may want to invest only in PreK programs located in public schools; others may also include community-based programs.

Moreover, in this era of fiscal constraints, tradeoffs are inevitable. Some policymakers may invest in intensive services for Second Language Learners; others may bolster arts programming. Some may invest in smaller class size; others may make family outreach the priority.

The price tag depends on the model you build. The cost-estimation framework on page 4 can help you cost out the services you want to provide.

The tools we provide can be customized.



## A Framework For Estimating PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> Costs

Principle	Core Elements	Cost Estimate Process	Decision Points
<b>1. Begin public responsibility for full-school-day education at age three</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voluntary, full-school-day PreK for 3-year-olds</li> <li>• Voluntary, full-school-day PreK for 4-year-olds</li> <li>• Mandatory, full-school-day Kindergarten</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Estimate number of PreK children based on eligibility &amp; expected participation rates</li> <li>• Estimate number of Kindergarten children currently attending part-day programs</li> <li>• Estimate basic per-child costs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who is eligible?</li> <li>• What is anticipated participation rate for each age/grade?</li> <li>• What mix of public/community-based/Head Start?</li> </ul>
<b>2. Provide high-impact supports across grades*</b> <b>*Beyond mandates. Special education services mandated, therefore not included here.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dual-language programs for all children</li> <li>• Well-rounded curriculum, including arts and physical education</li> <li>• Family engagement</li> </ul>	<p>Estimate costs. These ratios (based on work by Picus, Odden &amp; Goetz, 2009) may be useful:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 certified specialist for each 100 Second Language Learners (SLLs)</li> <li>• 1 family coordinator for each 100 children</li> <li>• 1 specialized arts teacher for each 5 lead teachers</li> <li>• 1 specialized PE teacher for each 5 lead teachers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are current dual-language services adequate? What is needed?</li> <li>• Which specialty subjects needed to round out curriculum?</li> <li>• What is desired family engagement model?</li> </ul>
<b>3. Align educational strategies and resources within and across grades</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aligned standards, curriculum, instruction, assessments</li> <li>• Attention to social competence</li> <li>• Shared/coordinated planning and professional development (PD)</li> <li>• Leadership capacity needed to support collaboration and alignment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify resources currently devoted to leading/planning/ implementing alignment efforts</li> <li>• Analyze adequacy of those resources</li> <li>• If they are inadequate, can available PD/planning time be refocused?</li> <li>• If not, how much additional PD/planning time will be needed?</li> <li>• Estimate cost of additional time, based on personnel costs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are key alignment challenges?</li> <li>• Who will lead alignment efforts? How will leader make time for this?</li> <li>• Is additional collaborative planning &amp; PD time needed to allow for alignment?</li> </ul>
<b>4. Ensure consistent personnel policies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lead teachers qualified to teach any grade PreK-3<sup>rd</sup></li> <li>• PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> lead teachers have B.A. &amp; certification in early childhood</li> <li>• Classroom aides (with A.A. degrees) in PreK classes with 20 or more children</li> <li>• PreK/elementary teachers with same qualifications get same compensation</li> <li>• Specialist teachers have needed preparation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determine prevailing salaries for personnel with specified credentials</li> <li>• Determine salary differentials needed to reach parity between PreK and K-3<sup>rd</sup></li> <li>• Determine number of aides needed</li> <li>• Determine costs of supporting current staff to secure needed preparation/credentials</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are tradeoffs needed (i.e., larger class size for better prepared staff)?</li> <li>• Can current staff be helped to secure needed credentials?</li> </ul>

Sources: Picus, Odden & Goetz, 2009; Russo, 2007; Zigler, Gilliam & Jones, 2006.

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## PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> Basics

As they grapple with the complexities of costing out an integrated PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> approach, different teams of researchers have placed priority on different components (Picus, Odden & Goetz, 2009; Russo, 2007; Zigler, Gilliam & Jones, 2006). They all agree, however, on four bedrock principles of PreK-3<sup>rd</sup>.

**1) Begin public responsibility for full-school-day education at age three.**

This includes voluntary PreK for three- and four-year-olds, as well as mandatory full-school-day Kindergarten.

**2) Provide high-impact supports, beyond mandates, across grades.** To meet high standards, millions of young children need more than the minimum—those basic services mandated by the state. Today, no public system can afford to put into place all of the instructional and support services it would wish for its students. Policymakers must make hard choices based on their schools' most urgent challenges and their constituencies' highest priorities.

Our framework recognizes special education as mandated services and calls for: dual-language programs for all children; a well-rounded curriculum, including physical education and the arts; and family engagement. However, we recognize that your state, district or school may choose to concentrate on a particular curriculum area (such as literacy or math), or focus on children's social competence, or add tutoring services for struggling young readers. The key is that the PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> approach goes beyond mandates in addressing the most urgent educational challenges, and coordinates efforts across grades.



**3) Align educational strategies and resources within and across grades.**

As things stand, most PreK, Kindergarten and elementary school teachers work in isolation from one another. Typically, they spend their days at different sites, report to different supervisors, and have few (if any) opportunities to learn, plan or work together. Even teachers working at the same level may seldom collaborate.

The PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> approach supports district and school leaders as well as teachers, helping them link experiences and expectations in different grades and classrooms based on a deep understanding of how children develop and learn. It calls for standards, curricula, instructional strategies, assessments and student supports that are coordinated within and across grades, including when PreK services are provided by community-based organizations as well as public schools.

**4) Ensure consistent personnel policies.** Teachers working across the PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> continuum experience widely different preparation and training. Even those with similar qualifications may have very different working conditions, compensation, and benefits.

The PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> approach calls for a teacher with a B.A. degree in every classroom. It advocates equal compensation across grades for personnel who have equivalent qualifications and credentials.



### **PreK Costs**

Just over one-third of four-year-olds are in publicly supported PreK programs.

What will it cost to move toward universal Prekindergarten in your state or district?

**Many states and districts invest in robust PreK initiatives, then follow up with anemic Kindergarten programs. They prioritize the “Pre,” but forget the “K.”**

Researchers have estimated the operational cost of high-quality, full-school-day PreK to be in the \$7,000 to \$10,000 range per child for a school year, depending on a state’s teacher/staff salaries and program intensity (length of day and year and class size). Operational costs include all of the expenditures needed to run a program other than the capital investments needed for building construction or renovation.

According to researchers, these figures roughly approximate the annual cost of educating older public school students. To arrive at a back-of-the-envelope per-pupil PreK cost, you can look at the total operational cost per K-12 student in your state or district (Clifford et al, 2008). To estimate the total price tag, determine the total number of three- and four-year-olds and assume a 65 percent participation rate (based on the experience of Oklahoma, which offers access to all families with three- and four-year-olds) (Picus, Odden & Goetz, 2009).

### **Kindergarten Costs**

Kindergarten is a critical variable in the PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> equation. Many states and districts invest in robust PreK initiatives and then follow up with anemic Kindergarten programs. They prioritize the “Pre,” but forget the “K.” Nearly one-third of American children still attend part-time programs that last only two or three hours a day. Many attend state-funded full-school-day PreK, only to graduate into half-day Kindergarten. To estimate the annual cost of mandatory full-school-day Kindergarten, determine the number of children currently attending part-time (or no) Kindergarten programs, and calculate what it would cost to provide all of those children with full-school-day Kindergarten. Assume that the outlay for each Kindergarten child will equal your district’s (or school’s) average per-pupil expenditure for Grades One to Three.

### **Costs for Grades One to Three**

In these grades, additional costs primarily cover the provision of high-impact supports needed to meet students' educational needs, and the costs of aligning and integrating curricula via professional development across and within grades and sites. To estimate these costs, determine whether current funding for curriculum and professional development can be reallocated to support an intensive focus on creating and sustaining a seamless PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> approach. If this is not possible, what will it take to fund additional curriculum development, professional development, and shared planning time? What tradeoffs might be considered, especially in the context of fiscal constraints?

## **What Would PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> Cost Nationwide?**

FCD asked researchers Lawrence O. Picus, Allan Odden, and Michael Goetz to come up with an estimate. Recognizing that the price tag depends on state and district decisions about eligibility, staffing, and program intensity, the researchers made these assumptions:

- Universal access to PreK, with 65 percent participation levels for three- and four-year-olds
- PreK class size of 20
- One teacher and one aide per PreK class
- An “adequacy model,” including an enriched curriculum (more costly than many states' current per-pupil spending for the early grades)
- Curriculum alignment and integration costs covered through budget reallocations

Using these assumptions, they estimated total annual PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> costs for the nation at \$215 billion, or \$10,867 per PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> pupil. This represents an increase over current spending of \$71.5 billion, or \$3,626 per PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> pupil.

*L.O. Picus, A. Odden & M. Goetz. 2009. An evidence-based approach to estimating the national and state-by-state costs of an integrated PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> education program. Picus Associates.*



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## Moving to Action

Policymakers can take long strides toward an integrated PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> approach by building a model on the four essential elements presented here, and then using the Framework to cost out the services. But the work does not end there. It takes strong leadership and a coordinated advocacy effort, rooted in research, to make the case that the planned investments can lead to the results everyone wants.

**At the state level,** advocates can show how PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> addresses the achievement gap by pointing to New Jersey, where the state Supreme Court's landmark *Abbott v. Burke* Decisions mandated core elements of the PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> approach to remedy inequities in low-performing districts (known as Abbott Districts). In these districts, the Court called for:

- Voluntary full-school-day PreK programs for three- and four-year-olds as well as full-school-day Kindergarten programs
- High-impact supports, in the form of intensive literacy programming and assessments
- Aligned standards, curricula, and teaching expectations, as well as transition planning across grades and sites

New Jersey is committed to instructional alignment across PreK and the primary grades, despite the fact that only one-third of the state's PreK children are served in public school settings; the rest attend Head Start or community-based early education programs. Evaluations have documented achievement gains since these reforms were introduced. (For further information on program outcomes, go to [www.fcd-us.org](http://www.fcd-us.org).)

**At the district level,** advocates can offer the example of Montgomery County (Maryland) School District, the nation's sixteenth largest district. Since introducing its PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> initiative, Montgomery County raised achievement in reading and math for all subgroups of students and narrowed the gap between the highest and lowest performing subgroups. Advocates can also cite the Bremerton (Washington) School District, where a robust PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> initiative has been linked with significant gains in literacy and other skills that lay the groundwork for later achievement.

Both districts have paid for PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> essentials, in part, by reallocating existing dollars (see "Reallocating Existing Resources"). As districts shift resources to PreK-3<sup>rd</sup>, they keep their eyes on the prize: a strong educational foundation for every child designed around aligned curricula and assessments and supported by cross-grade professional learning communities.

## Reallocating Existing Resources

Montgomery County (Maryland) School District's PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> initiative has been phasing in all of the "essentials" described in this Brief. Janine Bacquie, Director of Early Childhood Programs and Services, reports that there were significant start-up costs, including research, curriculum development, design and benchmarking of assessments, and professional development for teachers, support staff, and school leaders. She adds that once the initiative's core elements have been rolled out, PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> can be sustained by reallocating existing resources.

Reallocation is the watchword of the Bremerton (Washington) School District's PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> team. According to Special Programs Director, Linda Sullivan-Dudzic, the challenge is to pry loose federal and state dollars from areas where they are ineffectively spent and use them "for what those programs were intended to be used for," namely enhancing the quality of early childhood programs, aligning curricula, and providing professional development. There are additional costs—for assessment support, additional cross-grade meetings, and additional curricular materials—but even in hard times, they are unlikely to be deal breakers.

For more information on these districts' PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> efforts, go to [www.fcd-us.org](http://www.fcd-us.org).

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## References and Online Resources

### References:

R.M. Clifford, G.M. Crawford, H. Stebbins, S.S. Reszka & B. Coatney. 2009. Financing services for 3- and 4-year olds in a PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> school. *Issues in PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> Education*, Number Three. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, FPG Child Development Institute, FirstSchool.

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A. Russo. 2007. *The key to NCLB success: Getting in right from the start*. Washington, DC: New American Foundation, Issue Brief #5 (May 21).

E. Zigler, W.S. Gilliam & S.M. Jones. 2006. *A vision for universal preschool education*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

### Online Resources:

NEW AMERICA FOUNDATION

<http://www.newamerica.net/issues/education#>

See especially: S. Mead. Feb. 2009. 10 New Ideas for Early Education in the 111th Congress.

FIRSTSCHOOL/UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHAPEL HILL

<http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~firstschool/>

See especially: Clifford, et al. 2009, cited above.

L.O. Picus, A. Odden & M. Goetz. 2009. *An evidence-based approach to estimating the national and state-by-state costs of an integrated PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> education program*. Foundation for Child Development Research Brief.

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E. Zigler, 2009. Focusing Title I where it matters. *Education Week*, Feb. 4.

[http://www.fcd-us.org/resources/resources\\_show.htm?doc\\_id=824065](http://www.fcd-us.org/resources/resources_show.htm?doc_id=824065)

For FCD Publications on PreK-3<sup>rd</sup>, see the next page.

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## References and Online Resources

### **FCD Policy to Action Brief Series:**

No. 1: The Case for Investing in PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> Education: Challenging Myths about School Reform

[http://www.fcd-us.org/resources/resources\\_show.htm?doc\\_id=801522](http://www.fcd-us.org/resources/resources_show.htm?doc_id=801522)

### **FCD Advancing PreK-3rd Series:**

Policy briefs in the Advancing PreK-3rd Series include:

No. 4: PK-3: What Is It and How Do We Know It Works?

[http://www.fcd-us.org/resources/resources\\_show.htm?doc\\_id=463888](http://www.fcd-us.org/resources/resources_show.htm?doc_id=463888)

No. 5: Core Knowledge for PK-3 Teaching: Ten Components of Effective Instruction

[http://www.fcd-us.org/resources/resources\\_show.htm?doc\\_id=462123](http://www.fcd-us.org/resources/resources_show.htm?doc_id=462123)

No. 6: Carrots and Sticks: New Jersey's Effort to Create a Qualified PK-3 Workforce

[http://www.fcd-us.org/resources/resources\\_show.htm?doc\\_id=462367](http://www.fcd-us.org/resources/resources_show.htm?doc_id=462367)

No. 8: Challenging Common Myths About Young English Language Learners

[http://www.fcd-us.org/resources/resources\\_show.htm?doc\\_id=669789](http://www.fcd-us.org/resources/resources_show.htm?doc_id=669789)

### **FCD Reports:**

America's Vanishing Potential: The Case for PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> Education

[http://www.fcd-us.org/resources/resources\\_show.htm?doc\\_id=711495](http://www.fcd-us.org/resources/resources_show.htm?doc_id=711495)

### **FCD Web Site:**

PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> Resources by Audience

[http://www.fcd-us.org/issues/issues\\_show.htm?doc\\_id=835942](http://www.fcd-us.org/issues/issues_show.htm?doc_id=835942)

PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> Resources by Topic

[http://www.fcd-us.org/issues/issues\\_show.htm?doc\\_id=847000](http://www.fcd-us.org/issues/issues_show.htm?doc_id=847000)