

LA 4: Investment in Our Future

By Matt Stuller, Chairman
Blueprint Louisiana Board of Trustees

Senate Bill 286 may be one of the most important bills of the 2008 regular legislative session. The legislation phases in universal access to Louisiana's successful LA 4 pre-kindergarten program over the next six years.

LA 4 is nationally recognized for results. The at-risk children enter the program at the 5th and 10th percentile in language and math and end the year at the 50th percentile. This marked improvement exceeds nearly all other early childhood education efforts in our country, including those states known for Pre-K like Georgia and North Carolina.

A Georgetown University review of the program showed children participating in LA 4 have long-term improvement in elementary school test scores and a much lower chance of being retained in elementary school. Far fewer children from LA 4 classrooms enter school with the label of special education student.

Simply put, LA 4 is great public policy executed very well. Credit is due to our schools and teachers and the leadership of the Louisiana Department of Education.

Blueprint Louisiana and other like-minded groups see no reason to limit investment in something with a proven track record of improving education in our state. This opportunity should be easily available to all our children and parents.

When we spoke to school leaders, they told us not to forget about the majority of children in the middle – those who do not benefit from extra resources provided for at-risk children or the gifted and talented. They talked about the importance of providing better access to quality early childhood education for middle-income children – especially in rural communities where Pre-K choices are more limited.

Blueprint Louisiana also studied the impact of early childhood education on both learning and economics. We wanted to be sure the return on investment in LA 4 justified the state's expenditure. On the economic side, research in our state and others showed every dollar spent on quality early childhood education had a direct return of two to five dollars and indirect return of four to eight dollars.

By providing children a chance to learn during the years when their mind is most receptive, our leaders can invest where it makes sense. Any of us observing three- and four-year-olds know their capacity for learning. If you agree, let your legislators know you support continued investment in quality early childhood education in our state.

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Blueprint Louisiana is a citizen-driven effort to identify and implement essential changes to fundamentally improve Louisiana. Established in 2006, the nonpartisan effort is led and supported by community and business leaders from across the state. More than 3,000 citizens and 40 organizations, including a super-majority of legislators, have indicated their support for the Blueprint Agenda.