

*Press Release*  
**SREB News**



## State leaders call for higher-quality, better-coordinated early childhood programs

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**ATLANTA**—Leaders from across the 16 Southern Regional Education Board states are calling, in a major new report, for states to raise the quality of early education programs and ensure they are well-coordinated across different agencies and budgets.

Members of the SREB Early Childhood Commission spent portions of 2014 and 2015 with national experts studying early childhood issues and current knowledge about children's brain development to create the recommendations in *Building a Strong Foundation: State Policy for Early Childhood Education*, released today. The report and many other resources are online at [SREB.org/EarlyChildhood](http://SREB.org/EarlyChildhood).

"Our understanding about early childhood development has grown by leaps and bounds in recent years," said Kentucky Gov. Steve Beshear, who chaired the SREB commission. "Now it's time to put what we've learned into practice so that our young children get the best start possible."

Highlights from the report's recommendations for states:

- **Boost the quality of programs:** Set high standards for early education from birth to third grade. Evidence-based curricula should be aligned from pre-K into elementary school so that children's learning builds over time. Rating systems can help families find high-quality child care options and can incentivize providers to raise quality.
- **Develop more effective teaching:** Ensure teachers have specialized training for working with young children—and require continued learning for those who work in early childhood programs.
- **Focus accountability for results:** Measure students' progress and prioritize

funding for early education on performance and quality.

- **Provide greater access:** Work toward serving as many children as possible in high-quality programs—especially those who may be at risk for not being ready for school.
- **Coordinate governance and budgets:** Build a statewide policy framework to serve children from birth to age 8. Establish a statewide council to coordinate policy and make better use of all available public and private funding, which in many cases is spread across many government agencies, nonprofit entities and budgets.

“Healthy development from birth to age 3 makes children more likely to read on grade level, graduate from high school ready for college and careers, and become leaders in our next generation,” Gov. Beshear said. “Investing now in our very youngest citizens—our infants, our toddlers, our preschoolers—is not only a moral imperative. Economically, it’s a no-brainer.”

“States have come together from across the region to support higher quality in early education—because it’s the foundation of all learning that follows,” said Dave Spence, president of SREB, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that works with member states to improve education. “Quality matters most in early childhood education. That means providing the best teachers possible and focusing on research-based programs proven to make a difference.”

Southern states have long been national pacesetters in improving early childhood education, and several are cited in the Commission’s report as examples others can learn from: **Maryland** is a national leader in coordinating early childhood programs and in streamlining governance. **Oklahoma** has led the nation for nearly two decades in providing 4-year-olds with access to state-funded pre-K—and even classes for 3-year-olds.

**Georgia**, one of the first to provide universal access to state-funded pre-K, has linked data systems from early education into the early grades to help guide classroom instruction. **North Carolina** is a leader in pre-K program quality and requires teachers to have a bachelor’s degree and a specialized birth-through-pre-K license. **Kentucky** now requires publicly funded early education and care programs to participate in its All STARS quality rating and improvement system.

Members of the SREB Early Childhood Commission now take the recommendations back to their home states to guide policy and improvements in early childhood programs.

### ***Building a Strong Foundation: State Policy for Early Childhood Education***

[Full report \(PDF\) >](#)

[Executive summary \(PDF\) >](#)

[SREB/EarlyChildhood >](#)

*SREB staff, state leaders and national experts are available to discuss the report and the path forward in early education.*

*The Southern Regional Education Board works with member states to improve public*

*education at every level, from early childhood through doctoral education. Member states are Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia.*

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