

Obama pushes universal preschool proposal



By [Rachel Rose Hartman, Yahoo! News | The Ticket](#) - 20 hrs ago

President Barack Obama on Thursday promoted his new proposal to guarantee high quality preschool for every 4-year-old in the United States citing a need to bring low-income and minority children up to speed with higher-income children-- a move he says will translate into an economic boost.

"Every dollar we invest in high quality early education can save more than \$7 dollars later on," Obama said during a speech at a Community Recreation Center in Decatur, Ga. repeating a line first delivered during his State of the Union address Tuesday night when he unveiled the preschool proposal and other initiatives for the coming year.

The president told his Georgia audience Thursday that children who are not exposed to quality early education aren't prepared for kindergarten. They don't know "their numbers," "shapes," they'll know "fewer vocabulary words" and don't have a "capacity for focus." "They're going to be behind that first day," he said.

Obama argued that investing in early education will result eventually in a stronger workforce and will boost the economy.

"The size of your paycheck, though, shouldn't determine your child's future," he said.

The states of Georgia and Oklahoma have instituted universal preschool programs and the president said the same benefits seen in these states will be borne out across the country under his federal proposal.

According to a fact sheet released by the White House on Thursday morning, Obama's preschool plan would create a new federal-state cost-sharing partnership to guarantee high-quality preschool to all low- and moderate-income 4-year-old children, including families that earn up to 200 percent of the poverty level. The program would be extended to middle-class families who may pay on a sliding scale, and would incentivize full-day kindergarten.

The Department of Education will allocate funds to states based on the number of 4-year-olds in each state who qualify. Standards for preschools will include "well-trained teachers, who are paid comparably to K-12 staff," as well as small class size and a rigorous curriculum.

Preschools will have "qualified, highly educated teachers," Obama said Thursday. "This is not babysitting."

White House officials said the new preschool proposal will not replace or destroy the current Head Start early education government program. Instead, a new early Head Start program will be created to support communities affected by the new preschool proposal.

The White House has not released cost estimates for the new preschool plan. The president has said this proposal and others announced in his address would not add to the federal deficit.

The president on Wednesday traveled to Asheville, N.C. to [promote his manufacturing initiatives in a speech](#). On Friday, he is scheduled to deliver remarks in Chicago related to the economy. Senior administration officials say he will also address gun

violence during that trip.

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