

Gov. Pritzker Highlights Smart Start Successes In Belleville, Peoria, And Rochester

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PEORIA – Today, Governor JB Pritzker highlighted the more than 5,800 preschool seats created in the first year of Smart Start Illinois. The Governor visited Rochester Elementary School and Peoria Heights Grade School, and yesterday visited Ellis Elementary School to highlight the [program’s successes](#). [Smart Start](#) is Governor Pritzker’s transformative plan for early childhood education and care that represents the State’s ongoing commitment to children, families, teachers, and childcare providers.

“As a longtime advocate for early childhood education and as a father, I know this work begins long before a child steps foot into a grade school classroom,” said Governor JB Pritzker. “Quality early childhood care and education are vital for both working parents

and their young children. That's why my administration launched Smart Start, ensuring that every child in Illinois is set up for a lifetime of success."

"Every child deserves access to quality pre-school, and Smart Start is doing just that while also uplifting the early childhood workforce," said Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton. "The success of Smart Start further proves that Illinois is the best state to live, work and raise a family."



In the first year of Smart Start, the State invested \$250 million, including:

- \$75 million additional for the Early Childhood Block Grant to put Illinois on a path to creating more than 20,000 new Pre-K spots for every child who wants one
- \$130 million for nation-leading Childcare Workforce Compensation Contracts that will stabilize providers and give childcare workers a raise
- An additional \$40 million for Early Intervention programs to enhance services for families and give providers a raise
- \$5 million to expand the Illinois Department of Human Services' Home Visiting Program so more families who want it can receive this early support

In the first year of Smart Start, the Illinois State Board of Education awarded new funding to more than ninety-five programs in preschool deserts around the state to create

5,886 new preschool seats—exceeding the 5,000-seat goal set for the first year by 18%. Once all ninety-five programs are open, over 82,000 publicly funded preschool seats will be available across the state.

The Pritzker Administration is committed to making Illinois the best state in the nation to live and raise a family. Building on these early childhood care and education advancements, Governor Pritzker also recently announced a proposal to house all early childhood programs under [one unified state agency](#)—increasing access, support, and equity for all families and providers.

“We want every child to unlock their full potential,” said Speaker Pro Tempore Jehan Gordon-Booth (D-Peoria). “Investing in early childhood education eases the cost to working parents, stimulates the minds of our kids, and develops a strong foundation for children before they enter school.”

“Smart Start Illinois provides every 3 and 4-year-old in Illinois the opportunity to build a high-quality educational foundation,” said Assistant Senate Majority Leader David Koehler (D-Peoria). “These investments are a continued commitment to our children, teachers, and childcare providers. This funding will produce a bright future for the next generation.”

“Investing in early childhood education expands opportunities for our youth, setting them up to be lifelong learners,” said State Senator Doris Turner (D-Springfield). “Smart Start Illinois exemplifies our commitment to education across the state. We are one step closer to ensuring every child will receive a high-quality education.”

"As a former educator, I have seen firsthand the impact that a strong early education experience has on our students as they continue to move through school," said State Representative Sue Scherer (D-Decatur). "Children who do not have a good early education are much less likely to succeed in school than those who do. Smart Start narrows that gap and brings a world-class education to all young children in Illinois, regardless of where they live."

“Children in all corners of the state deserve the best of the best when it comes to early childhood education, and parents shouldn’t have to yield to unwanted financial hits to obtain that — with Smart Start, we’re turning that dream into reality,” said State Representative Sharon Chung (D-Bloomington). “Our investment will expand access to affordable childcare and strengthen funding for early childhood education. This goes hand in hand with the state’s trajectory of ensuring all young students have a strong, stable foundation of care as they venture into their first years of schooling.”

