BREAKING THE CYCLE OF POVERTY THROUGH KINDERGARTEN PREPAREDNESS:
Jumpstart’s Policy Principles
SEPTEMBER 2017
**Introduction**

Jumpstart’s vision is that every child in America enters kindergarten prepared to succeed. For nearly a quarter century, Jumpstart has been training thousands of college students and older volunteers to foster the development of language, literacy, and social-emotional competencies in young children from low-income communities across the country. Even as we provide the transformative power of our program to tens of thousands of children, we remain acutely aware of the needs of the millions of children in schools and communities in which Jumpstart does not yet serve—children whose earliest experiences position them behind the starting line in the race to success. Jumpstart firmly believes that the most effective way to unlock the potential of each and every child and disrupt the cycle of persistent poverty in our country is to ensure that high-quality early education taught by qualified and effective educators is available to all.

We know that early education works. High-quality preschool has a significant impact on children’s literacy, math, and social-emotional learning, and has lasting benefits, including increased high school graduation rates and lifetime earnings, and reduced crime and teen pregnancy. Many policymakers know it works too. The progress made in cities like New York City and Washington, D.C., and states such as Oklahoma and Iowa should be applauded. Yet, even places with the most advanced early education policies are still leaving children behind. Other states, meanwhile, with few intentional and enriching early education opportunities, are making no progress for our youngest learners who demonstrate the greatest need. With every passing day of inaction, more children are arriving to kindergarten without having had the early learning experiences that set them up for success. Thus, the foundation of Jumpstart’s policy advocacy agenda is early childhood education. We believe now is the time for a true commitment to ensuring that all children have access to affordable, high-quality early learning opportunities. Jumpstart advocates for investment by federal, state, and local governments in existing proven early education programs and future evidence-based programs that will deliver on the promise of opportunity to all young learners.

It is equally clear that success in school begins with the quality of educators. Yet, there is a crisis in the early education workforce. Nationwide, wages for early educators are simply unlivable. Early educators are responsible for instilling a love of learning, reading, and numbers in young children whose brains are growing at a rate faster than at any other time in their lives. These educators deserve reasonable compensation. In addition, certification and accreditation standards vary greatly state-to-state and city-to-city, leading to confusion and vast differences in quality. As a result, the field suffers from rampant turnover and frequent burnout that undermine the critical importance of these educators in the development of inquisitive and prepared young minds. In order for our youngest learners to build a strong foundation for lifelong learning, their educators must be well-prepared, trained, and supported in order to succeed and choose to stay in their preschool classrooms. Jumpstart advocates for certification, professional development, and compensation policies that will help establish a professionalized and stable field of early childhood educators.

At Jumpstart, we also know that the work of supporting and expanding affordable, high-quality early education does not begin or end in the classroom. We work to prepare and inspire the next generation of early educators, public servants, and parents. For more than two decades, our model has provided us with a unique lens through which to view the early education field, both from the perspective of the children in the classrooms we serve, and also those college students hoping to become early educators themselves. However, current and aspiring college students face extreme obstacles, including expensive tuition, a confusing and inadequate federal student grant and loan process, and a competitive and low-wage job market once they graduate. In 1979, it would have taken the average student...
385.5 hours at minimum wage to afford a year of average college tuition; today's college students would need to work 2,229 hours per year to fully afford the average annual tuition.¹ The high cost of higher education is particularly challenging for students from under-resourced communities, who often struggle to afford the degree that is crucial for them to break out of the cycle of poverty. All students deserve access to an affordable higher education that provides them with ample workforce training opportunities within a realistic schedule. Jumpstart advocates for a more affordable and accessible higher education system that allows all students to reach their goals, and a wider range of programs that promote service, workforce training, and loan forgiveness to encourage the next generation of early educators.

Finally, as a proud member of the national service movement and the AmeriCorps and Senior Corps programs, Jumpstart has seen firsthand the enormous impact of national service on individual participants and the communities they serve. Volunteerism promotes valuable workforce skill development for participants while providing cost-effective services to countless children, seniors, veterans, and communities. Moreover, for every $1 the federal government invests in service, the private sector invests more than $1 in matching funds. National service providers, including Jumpstart, support causes such as early literacy, hunger, community development, disaster relief, and veterans’ health and wellness. Jumpstart advocates for continued government investment in national service, including AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, and local initiatives.

What Jumpstart Stands For: Our 4 Core Principles

The sections below detail specific federal, state, and local policies that Jumpstart supports while also outlining the framework Jumpstart utilizes to evaluate legislative opportunities. While this document may not include each and every policy proposal or current program that impacts young children, it can be used as a roadmap toward overall policy changes that we as an organization encourage governments to adopt. These policy principles speak to our values as an organization and the future we envision—a future in which every child, no matter their zip code, can reach their full potential. In our vision of the future, the opportunity gap is eliminated before it even begins. Below is how we get there.

I ACCESSIBLE, HIGH-QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Head Start

The federal Early Head Start and Head Start programs provide funding and professional development to local grantees, enabling them to provide high-quality early education to children from low-income families from birth to age five. Head Start is the largest federal investment in early education for low-income families, yet it reached fewer than 1 million children in 2016–2017, just a fraction of the nearly 10.5 million children under age six from low-income families in the country. While the most recent federal reauthorization of the Head Start program expanded access to more working families, increased quality and training standards, and created a new system requiring the lowest performing grantees to rebid for contracts, there is still work to be done to provide high-quality learning

¹ https://newrepublic.com/article/122814/how-many-hours-would-it-take-you-work-todays-college-tuition
opportunities for all children from low-income families. The program is due for reauthorization, and any new law must ensure that more young children are able to access this high-quality program.

**Title I funds for early education**

The federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) governs Title I funds. The U.S. Department of Education provides these funds for schools and districts across the country with a disproportionately large share of students from low-income families in order to increase educational opportunities for this population. Under current law, states and school districts can use Title I funds for early education. This commitment was enhanced in the recent reauthorization of ESEA, the Every Student Succeeds Act, which requires states to address if and how they will use allocated Title I funds for early education in their state plans. However, just a small percentage of districts actually take advantage of this opportunity. More states should spend these funds on programs serving their youngest learners, thereby maximizing the return on investment of these federal resources.

**Preschool Development Grants**

Preschool Development Grants (PDGs) are competitive federal grants provided to states to create high-quality, state-funded preschool programs, expand existing programs, or convert existing low-quality or unaccredited slots to high-quality slots. PDGs are awarded for up to four years, with at least 65% of the funding designated for preschool programs to implement high-quality preschool in high-needs areas, and no more than 35% designated to improve state-level preschool infrastructure.

**Local early education initiatives**

Early education opportunities for children are largely governed at the state and local level. While current policies vary, state and local investment that ensures access to high-quality education for every child, no matter their family’s economic circumstance, is crucial. Federal funding alone cannot provide the support needed to guarantee high-quality learning opportunities for every child. A broad coalition of support from local, state, and federal officials is required to make impactful change. Legislation that levels the playing field for all children will look different in each community, but effective programming will focus on expanding access for children from low-income families, raising wages and professional development opportunities for early educators, and creating and expanding dedicated funding streams for programs to expand the length of their school days and years. While some measure of flexibility
Jumpstart supports state and local legislation and funding proposals that drive an agenda of accessible, high-quality early education provided by well-trained and appropriately-compensated educators.

A PROFESSIONAL, STABLE, AND WELL-COMPENSATED EARLY EDUCATION WORKFORCE

Wages

The national median annual wage for preschool teachers is $28,570, while the average kindergarten teacher's salary is $51,640. Head Start teachers make $28,995 on average. Child care workers make even less, roughly $20,320 annually. Early educators care for our children and provide them with their earliest learning experiences. Due primarily to these depressed pay rates, however, the turnover rate for early educators nationwide is over 30 percent. Young children require stability for long-term growth and comfort in the classroom, and educators require stability to gain experience and grow professionally. Federal, state, and local policies that fail to address early educator wages unwittingly encourage the most qualified educators to leave the preschool environment and teach in higher paying settings or leave the education field altogether. Our laws and regulations should be focused on keeping qualified educators in preschool classrooms. Nationwide, preschool quality cannot improve without high-quality, motivated, and well-compensated professionals in the classroom and must be supported by policies that encourage the best educators to enter and stay in the preschool classroom.

Jumpstart supports federal, state, and local legislation that moves toward pay parity between skilled early educators and their similarly credentialed peers in public school settings, including starting salary, salary increases, and benefits. Jumpstart also supports innovative state and local funding mechanisms that raise early educator salaries, provided that the funding stream positively impacts the local community.

Accreditation and professional development

State and federal requirements around preschool teacher accreditation and professional development vary significantly. While the federal Head Start program now requires at least half of all Head Start teachers to have an associate or bachelor's degree, state law oversees accreditation standards for nearly all other early education programs and educators. State requirements vary from certification programs to associate and bachelor's degrees in relevant early education fields. While teachers with associate and bachelor's degrees tend to outperform teachers without those degrees, accreditation standards must be raised in tandem with wage increases in order to ensure that highly educated teachers choose to remain in preschool classrooms. In addition, all early educators, regardless of their level of education, need access to regular, effective professional development opportunities to continue to hone their skills and learn new practices that reflect current research. Professional development and credentialing opportunities must recognize the distinct development of young children and specifically prepare early educators for their work with young children.

Jumpstart supports federal, state, and local policies that seek to provide all preschool children with highly-qualified, well-trained, and appropriately-compensated early educators.

3 http://www.childresearch.net/projects/ecce/2012_04.html
Federal Work Study

Federal Work Study (FWS) is a federal program that pays colleges and universities 75% of the cost of wages to employ students with financial need at the institution itself or at an off-campus for-profit or nonprofit organization. In addition to receiving direct wages for their work, which can be used to pay for college and living expenses, students receive valuable work experience, often in careers related to their course of study. Jumpstart partners with over 70 colleges and universities to enable work study qualifying students to participate in our transformational program that provides each student with 200-300 hours of workforce training in early education annually.

Since 1998, colleges and universities that receive FWS funds have been required to spend at least 7% of those dollars on community service activities. Schools are also required to have a children or family literacy project that employs FWS students.

Jumpstart supports increased funding for FWS, including an increase beyond the 7% community service requirement that encourages students to pursue careers in public service. Jumpstart also supports an update to the FWS allocation formula in order to ensure these federal funds best serve low-income students.

College affordability and student loans

Aspiring early educators often face their first barrier long before they ever enter the classroom. In working toward a post-secondary degree, students face skyrocketing tuition and a patchwork of incomplete federal loan and grant solutions.

The federal government offers a number of loan and grant programs, though finding the right solution for each student is not always simple. The first challenge students face typically occurs when filling out the complicated Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Once making it through this step, students may be offered a slew of federal student aid options including Pell Grants, Supplemental Education Opportunity Grants, Federal Work Study, Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education Grants, and/or direct or indirect federal loans. The web of federal solutions exists to solve a fundamental problem: higher education—even at public institutions and community colleges—is too expensive for students from low-income and middle-income families. All students, especially those looking toward careers in public service and education, should have access to lower tuition and a less complicated, more effective system of federal aid.

As Congress works to reauthorize the Higher Education Act, Jumpstart will support legislation that seeks to make college more affordable and accessible, particularly for low-income and first-generation college students. These policies may include a simplified application process, grants that are pegged to the national inflation rate, and an expansion of grant programs for aspiring teachers, particularly for early childhood educators. Jumpstart also supports state and local initiatives to reduce or eliminate college and university tuition, especially for low-income and first-generation students.
Loan forgiveness

The government offers teacher-specific federal loan forgiveness and federal loan cancellation programs to public elementary and secondary school teachers who have been teaching for a number of years in low-income schools. Preschool teachers are only eligible for these programs, however, if the state where they teach considers preschool to be a part of their public elementary education program. This patchwork system leaves out teachers who work in early education settings deemed to be outside the public elementary education network and who are often making the lowest wages. These loan forgiveness programs should be revised so that all early educators are eligible.

In addition, the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program guarantees partial federal loan forgiveness to individuals who work in the nonprofit or government sector after ten years of making regular loan payments. The promise made to forgive the remaining balance on these loans has not yet been fulfilled, as the first intended recipients become eligible in 2017. PSLF has inspired over 400,000 educators, nonprofit workers, and public servants to pursue careers of true community service, and they should be rewarded with the promise made by the federal government ten years ago.

A COMMITMENT TO NATIONAL SERVICE

The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) is the federal agency that oversees national service programs, including AmeriCorps and Senior Corps, and provides funding to state service commissions to run programs locally. Jumpstart is a proud member of the AmeriCorps and Senior Corps networks. Proposals to reduce funding for or eliminate CNCS altogether only serve to harm neighborhoods and undermine two of the federal government’s most effective programs.

AmeriCorps

AmeriCorps supports a wide range of local service programs by engaging more than 75,000 individuals in intensive community service each year. AmeriCorps provides grants to a network of local and national organizations, like Jumpstart, committed to using national service to address critical community needs in education, public safety, health, or the environment. National service prepares young people for the workforce, builds stronger neighborhoods and communities, and develops in young people the values of civic duty and compassion toward others. National service is also a cost-effective approach to community development. In 2015 alone, 62.6 million Americans volunteered approximately 7.8 billion hours of their time, worth an estimated $184 billion to the economy.

AmeriCorps members who successfully complete a term of service are eligible to receive a Segal AmeriCorps Education Award which must be used to pay for post-secondary education costs or repay student loans. Thus, in addition to developing workforce skills and improving communities, AmeriCorps actively contributes to making higher education more financially viable.

In order to inspire and promote community service experiences for as many people as possible, Jumpstart supports increased federal funding for AmeriCorps and increased state investment in local service commissions. Jumpstart supports increased investments in the Segal AmeriCorps Education Award and supports making the Segal AmeriCorps Education Award tax-free.
Senior Corps

Each year, Senior Corps taps the skills, talents, and experience of more than 245,000 individuals age 55 and over across the nation to meet a wide range of community challenges. Senior Corps members respond to natural disasters, help frail seniors and adults with disabilities maintain independence, and mentor and educate students in organizations such as Jumpstart. These older volunteers not only help meet the needs of their communities, but also remain healthy, energetic, and mentally active by engaging in service.

In order to promote the well-being and community engagement of older adults, as well as harness the knowledge and experience of seniors, Jumpstart supports increased federal funding for and state investment in Senior Corps.

Jumpstart’s Other Priorities

While early childhood education, the early education workforce, higher education, and national service are at the core of Jumpstart’s policy advocacy agenda, we understand there are many related issues that have an impact on our Corps members and the children, families, and communities they serve. A national history of social and economic injustice for low-income families, people of color, and other historically marginalized individuals has created the institutionalized poverty that Jumpstart seeks to end. We at Jumpstart are cognizant of the interconnected network of policy issues that both creates and maintains these injustices. Policies related to health, safety, housing, immigration, taxes, and many other issues have a significant influence on the ability of low-income children and families to succeed. Jumpstart supports policy proposals that create opportunities for people in under-resourced communities, and opposes any and all policies that disregard, target, or scapegoat these communities and thereby result in greater inequality. Jumpstart strategically adds its voice to efforts that support policy proposals committed to social justice and economic opportunity for all.

Conclusion

Each year, Jumpstart’s evidence-based program prepares thousands of three-, four-, and five-year-olds to succeed and thrive in kindergarten and beyond. However, millions of children in low-income communities around the country do not have access to high-quality early learning opportunities like Jumpstart, and will enter kindergarten already behind. Institutional poverty has many roots, yet high-quality early education has the potential to disrupt this cycle, setting children on a lifelong path to success in school and beyond. In order to maximize the effectiveness of early education, public policies must address all of the individuals impacted: children and families as well as current and future early educators. With unified public policies that are tailored to work for each of our communities, we can achieve Jumpstart’s vision that every child in America enters kindergarten prepared to succeed.