

Making preschool possible for everyone

by Amy Scott February 11, 2013

President Obama will lay out his second-term agenda Tuesday night in the annual State of the Union address. On the wish list of one group with ties to the Administration: expanding access to preschool. The Center for American Progress is pushing a plan to increase federal funding so that all 3- and 4-year-olds can attend pre-kindergarten.

Many studies have shown that kids who go to preschool end up better off.

“They are much less likely to end up in jail, they’re much more likely to have higher earnings over the course of their lifetime, better health outcomes,” says Michael Linden, the center’s director of tax and budget policy. “There’s all sorts of good economic and broader societal effects that come from investing in quality pre-k.”

Under the plan the government would match state funding, on average, up to \$10,000 per child per year. The plan would add almost \$100 billion to the budget over ten years -- a tough sell in Washington.

The government doesn’t have a great track record with preschool, says Neal McCluskey, associate director of the Cato Institute’s Center for Educational Freedom. Recent studies have shown that the federal Head Start program for low-income kids doesn’t always produce lasting benefits.

“Federal, large-scale pre-k programs are not providing the kinds of outcomes that we’re being told we should expect if it gets further involved,” he says.

The Center for American Progress proposal also recommends increasing child care subsidies for infants and toddlers, citing research that shows parents with reliable child care are more likely to hold down jobs and earn more money.