



Obama, Shakira Push Preschool Education

By [Blake Neff](#)
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The Obama administration teamed up with pop singer Shakira and The Walt Disney Company on Wednesday to announce a billion-dollar investment for American children's access to pre-K education, while pressuring Republicans in Congress to add far more.

The Colombian musical artist may be more famous for her bestselling singles "Hips Don't Lie" and "Waka Waka [This Time For Africa]," but Shakira also has a longstanding interest in education, a fact that the Obama administration used to its advantage by having her team up with Secretary of Education Arne Duncan to take questions on Twitter about expanding access to preschool.

Preschool costs ~ \$8k per year per child. Juvenile detention costs ~ \$90k per year per child. Again-numbers don't lie. [#ShakiraEdChat](#)

— [Shakira \(@shakira\)](#) [December 10, 2014](#)

.[@keithdhardy](#) unequal access to ed. affects nations rich & poor, but in the US school dropouts will be reduced by increasing ECD programs

— [Shakira \(@shakira\)](#) [December 10, 2014](#)

Just after the online Q&A, Obama spoke at a White House summit of educational, business and nonprofit leaders, where he announced a new investment of over \$1 billion into Head Start as well as various state pre-K programs. The over \$1 billion price tag will be met by both public funds (which Obama says have already been appropriated by Congress) as well as over \$350 million in private donations. Among the notable private donors are Disney, which gave \$55 million and the LEGO Foundation, which gave \$5 million.

"Even in Washington, that's real money," said Obama.

Real or not, the president wants a great deal more of it. Currently, just over one quarter of American 4-year-olds attend some kind of state-funded preschool. While the announced \$1 billion expenditure will help an estimated 63,000 more children attend pre-K, Obama has repeatedly urged Congress to fund universal, nationwide pre-K education. The estimated price to

kickstart that venture is over \$75 billion, and so far, Republicans have shown little interest in such an effort.

Both Obama and Shakira claim that investing in pre-K education will reap big dividends in the long run, with each dollar spent yielding \$7 or more in eventual economic growth.

Not everybody is convinced, however. The Cato Institute's Neal McCluskey, who heads the think tank's Center for Educational Freedom, [was sharply critical](#) of Obama's big announcement in a blog post Wednesday morning. The notion of a 700 percent return on pre-K is based a limited study not comparable to modern pre-K, he said, while even the Obama administration's [own studies](#) indicate that Head Start has a very marginal impact at best.

"A splashy event intended to proclaim something is true for which we just don't have good evidence doesn't help anyone," said McCluskey.