



Investments in Early Childhood Education Help Meet the Nation's K-12 Goals

The federal government and states have committed to improving student achievement in K-12 schools. High quality, comprehensive early learning and care for at-risk children, starting at birth, can play a prominent role in helping to improve student success and closing the achievement gap. If all students are prepared to learn when they enter kindergarten, schools can immediately begin to teach the appropriate grade-level standards-based curriculum, rather than helping children play catch-up.

Early Childhood Education Prepares Children for Academic Success

Early childhood education is critical to children's long-term cognitive and social-emotional development and academic success. Access to high quality, comprehensive early childhood opportunities for at-risk children, starting at birth, can help improve their long-term student proficiency in reading and math. These early education opportunities help build the foundation for disadvantaged children to perform as well as their peers when they enter kindergarten.

- ✓ 85% of the brain's core structure is developed before the age of 3. Research shows that children who participate in high quality, birth to 5 early education programs, such as Early Head Start and Head Start, have improved cognitive development and academic success.
- ✓ By the spring of their kindergarten year, Head Start graduates – all of whom come from the lowest-income families -- approach national norms in early reading and early writing, and are close to the national norms in early math and vocabulary knowledge.
- ✓ The Abecedarian program shows that as they progress through school, children who are enrolled in early childhood programs demonstrate improved math and language scores, enhanced cognitive and social skills, and decreased grade retention by age 15 (31.2% of treatment students held-back compared to 54.5% of control group students).
- ✓ Early childhood education participants are also significantly more likely to complete high school and enroll in higher education programs (35% enrollment) than their control group peers (14% enrollment).

Investing in Early Childhood Education is a Cost-Effective Way to Improve Outcomes

High quality early childhood education helps to ensure that disadvantaged children are more prepared for school. Participants perform better in school, are less likely to need remediation, and are more likely to meet state academic proficiency goals. Effective interventions that begin at birth help states, school districts and schools satisfy the requirements of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) by helping to reduce dropout rates and increase graduation rates. Furthermore, investments in early childhood programs demonstrate high returns which help lessen the strain on the education system in later years.