



## Special Education: The Case for Greater Investments in Early Learning

Early intervention for children with special education needs is a critical strategy for improving later outcomes. Research illustrates that children with disabilities who are identified early and receive appropriate early intervention services and family support before kindergarten have a greater chance of meeting their social and educational potential than children who do not receive services until they enter school.

### **High Quality Early Childhood Education Reduces the Need for Special Education**

Studies have found that quality early childhood education leads to a decreased need for special education later on in a child's academic life.

- The Perry Preschool Project found that by second grade, participants had significantly higher achievement scores and were less likely to receive special education services.
- The Abecedarian Program demonstrated a meaningful drop in the number of low-income children requiring later special education; only 12 percent of the treatment group was placed in special education, compared to 48 percent of the control group.
- Overall, Early Head Start children performed better on measures of cognition, language and social-emotional functioning than their peers who did not receive Early Head Start and they were less likely to be in the “at-risk” category of cognitive and language functioning.

### **Early Intervention Reduces Remediation Costs**

Early intervention results in a reduced need for special education services later in life, in the child being retained in the same grade less often, and, in some cases, the child being indistinguishable from classmates without special needs. Examples of long-term savings from early investments include:

- The Perry Preschool Project found that when schools invest in high quality early education, they immediately begin to recover their investments through savings in special education services.
- Wood (1981) calculated the total cumulative costs to age 18 of special education services to children beginning intervention at birth, age 2, age 6, and at age 6 with no eventual movement to regular education. The total cost of services begun at birth was \$37,273, while the total cost if begun at age 6 was between \$46,816 and \$53,340.
- A 3-year follow-up in Tennessee showed that for every dollar spent on early treatment, \$7 in savings was realized within 36 months.
- In Colorado, a state-wide early intervention program had savings of \$4 for every dollar spent within a 3-year period.

A significant investment in high quality early education for at-risk children age birth to five will lead to improved outcomes for children, and significant special education cost savings for the federal government and states.