



EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION 2006 Community Commitment Issue

ALL CHILDREN SHOULD HAVE ACCESS TO
QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION
AND DEVELOPMENT INVOLVING PARENTS
AND FAMILIES AS ESSENTIAL PARTNERS

High quality early childhood education prepares children for success

Quality early childhood education benefits children of all social and economic groups. Children in high quality early childhood settings are more likely to achieve academically and avoid special education placements as children and earn more, pay more taxes, and commit fewer crimes as adults.³⁰ Communities also benefit through enhanced economic vitality.³¹

Striking disparities in what children know and are able to do are evident well before they enter kindergarten. Brain research underscores the importance of early experience and environmental inputs in helping create and strengthen important neural pathways that impact hearing, vision, motor skills, and cognitive and emotional development. High quality comprehensive early childhood services for at-risk families with young children can improve children's life outcomes.³² Features of effective early childhood programs include well-trained caregivers, smaller child-to-staff ratios, and more intensive and comprehensive programs.³³

Early childhood education costs easily amount to \$4,000 to \$10,000 a year for one child. For low-income families, assistance is essential in order for them to be able to work and remain self-sufficient. Mothers who receive child care assistance are 40% more likely to remain employed after two years than those who do not receive assistance. Former welfare recipients with young children are 82 percent more likely to be employed after two years if they receive child care assistance. Unfortunately, assistance is less available.³⁴ On average during 2005-06, there were 48,347 children on the waiting list for subsidized child care each month.³⁵ In addition, both CCDBG and TANF funds declined in 2004 and projections are for further decreases in funding. Without new federal funds, the number of children in low-income families who receive assistance will continue to decline. Studies show that families who lose child care assistance are often forced to quit their jobs, change work hours, spend their savings, go into debt, turn to welfare, or choose lower quality, less stable child care that is often detrimental to the child's development.³⁶

Research demonstrates the following benefits of high quality early childhood services for children:

- **Social benefits.** Children in quality early childhood environments have less anxiety, develop more secure relationships with caregivers, and have more positive interactions with peers compared to less competent play, more behavior problems, and more negative interactions with peers among children in low quality settings.
- **Cognitive benefits.** Higher scores on readiness assessments and standardized cognitive and language competence tests are found among children in quality early childhood environments.
- **Economic benefits.** The economic development impacts of early childhood services include effects on regional economies (in terms of jobs, income, and purchase of commodities in other economic sectors), effects on parents (supporting workers and their employers), and effects on children (building human capital).
- **Long-term benefits.** Children in high quality early childhood settings are more likely to graduate, be gainfully employed, own a home, and avoid criminal activity.