

## THE SCIENCE BEHIND IT



### **Does quality early childhood education lead to more successful lives as adults?**

Yes, many studies have found that quality early learning experiences contribute to people's success as adults.

How do early learning experiences make a difference?

They improve children's thinking skills and performance in school. They also have positive effects on health and behavior. Not all programs demonstrate all of these benefits, and the evidence is more conclusive in some areas than others, but it is strong enough to guide action.

## Where are kids getting this kind of care?

During their early years—from birth to age 8—many children spend time outside their homes in early care and education settings, such as child care centers, Head Start programs, preschools, and schools.



## So what’s considered a “quality” experience?

High-quality early care and education requires secure and nurturing relationships with adults who know how to support children’s development and learning.

Children who have these relationships with adults tend to be more self-confident, better at interacting with others, and more effective learners. Neither nurturing children nor teaching them is enough by itself for optimal learning. The two work in tandem.

## Is it important for this to happen early?

In early childhood, developmental changes can have profound and lasting consequences for a child’s future. Even in their earliest years, children are

starting to learn about their world in sophisticated ways that are often underestimated.

For example, did you know that even infants and toddlers can reason about the intentions of other people, intuit aspects of addition and subtraction, and draw conclusions about cause and effect?

Enriching experiences in the early years will support children's healthy development and enhance learning. In contrast, serious stress or adversity can have harmful effects on the growing brain and a child's developmental progress. Development is rapid and it's cumulative, with early progress laying the foundation for future learning.



## Can't pretty much anyone teach a toddler?

No. The science clearly indicates that the professional task of educating young children requires the same high level of sophisticated knowledge and competencies related to child development, content knowledge, and educational practices as that of educating older children.

Yet, the perception that educating young children requires less expertise than educating older students helps to sustain policies—such as lower compensation, less program funding, and fewer professional supports—that make it difficult to maximize the potential of early learning programs and early childhood educators to effectively serve young children.

## I can see why parents care about this. Why should the rest of us?

Investments in high-quality early care and education, provided by a highly qualified workforce, can pay off for years to come. In addition to benefiting children as they develop into adults, it helps society at large.

- It enables parents to be employed as part of the current workforce.
- It's also a critical investment to develop a skilled and productive future workforce to meet the needs of employers and contribute to the economic growth and prosperity of the nation.

## Does everyone have access to high-quality programs?

Unfortunately, no. High-quality early care and education is available to only a fraction of the families who need and want it. To ensure that all children can enjoy the benefits, many policy actions are still needed, especially related to how high-quality early care and education is financed and how the early care and education workforce is prepared and supported.



## How is early childhood education financed now?

Today, early care and education consists of separate programs and services with different funding streams, eligibility requirements, and quality standards. Families bear much of the burden of paying for these services, and many families that qualify for subsidized programs don't receive assistance because of inadequate funding. Even families with moderate incomes often can't afford high-quality services.

More resources for early care and education would not only reach more families but could also improve the quality of programs. Increased funding, if managed through an integrated framework, could better support the workforce, apply more consistent standards, and boost accountability.

## How do we make that happen? Is it even possible?

Yes, reliable, accessible, and affordable high-quality early care and education for young children can be achieved. But it will require financial and other resources to be shared across the public and private sector while utilizing more coordinated financing mechanisms.

It will also require a commitment to major increases in public investment, a more equitable distribution of the share from family contributions, and greater commitment from employers, private philanthropy, and corporations. Such investments will benefit children and their families and also society at large.