

# Ensuring Early Success for Young Children

*For every \$1 spent on early learning, society saves \$7 in later costs.*

W.S. Barnett cited in Economic Opportunity Institute  
([www.econop.org/ELC/Early Learning/ELC-SchoolReadiness.htm](http://www.econop.org/ELC/Early Learning/ELC-SchoolReadiness.htm))

## The Data

- **Infant and child health status.** Almost 8% of babies have low birth weight (*Kids Count 2004 Data Book Online*, [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org)), which is linked to behavioral disorders and visual and auditory impairments. (National Vital Statistics Reports, v.51, 11, June 25, 2003) Infant health problems are a strong predictor of lower pre-school cognitive abilities.
- **School readiness.** Over 40% of new kindergartners do not enter school fully prepared to learn. (Kauffman Early Learning Exchange, *Set for Success*, v.1 no.1, 2002, Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation) Teachers report that at least half of all children have difficulty following directions and/or working independently and lack specific academic skills. (Rimm-Kaufman et al., *Kindergarten Teachers Perceive Difficulty in Transitions to School*, *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 15, 2000)
- **Implications for later life.** Young children who do not attend preschool programs have been shown to have higher grade retention, lower high school graduation rates, less college attendance, higher juvenile crime rates, and lower lifetime earnings. ([www.earlycare.org/factsheet1.htm](http://www.earlycare.org/factsheet1.htm))

## The Issues

- **Lack of health insurance coverage.** Almost 11 million children – disproportionately African American and immigrant children – are uninsured. ([www.omhrc.gov/OMH/sidebar/datastats1.htm](http://www.omhrc.gov/OMH/sidebar/datastats1.htm))
- **Insufficiency of affordable child care.** 61% of children under age 6 are in care outside the home. (National Conference of State Legislatures, *Child Care and Early Education Issues Overview*, [www.ncsl.org/programs/cyf/ccoverview.htm](http://www.ncsl.org/programs/cyf/ccoverview.htm)) But lower-income families experience more limited choices due to the high cost of care, transportation barriers, and lack of affordable options. (“*Affordable, Accessible Early Childhood Education Fact Sheet*,” [www.ywca.org](http://www.ywca.org)) Nearly 40% of children eligible for Head Start do not receive this service. (Children’s Defense Fund, *Head Start Fact Sheet*, February, 2003)
- **Underinvestment in early child care workers.** A study of the human services workforce that included child care workers found that especially those staff working with low-income children felt less prepared for their work, underpaid, and underappreciated. (Paul Light, *The Health of the Human Services Workforce*, [www.aecf.org/initiatives/hswi](http://www.aecf.org/initiatives/hswi))
- **Challenges in family learning environments.** Parental circumstances such as limited incomes and limited literacy impede children’s early learning environments. Further, 29% of immigrant children live in crowded housing. (*National Survey of America’s Families, 1999*). And 1 in 10 children (but 1 in 4 African American children) have mothers with depression, which is linked to lower school performance. (AECF Fact Sheet, *Racial Disparities in School Readiness*, 2004)

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## Options for Philanthropy

- **Supporting the development of culturally competent services and supports.** With increasing population diversity, especially among children, existing organizations may require capacity building to be effective with a range of children. Publications like *Building Culturally and Linguistically Competent Services to Support Young Children, Their Families, and School Readiness* (K.S. Hepburn for Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2004) offer practitioners guidance. In addition, new culturally-based organizations may emerge that can benefit from more general organizational capacity-building.
- **Underwriting advocacy for the expansion of effective policies.** When policies have a good track record and are cost-effective, but have a limited reach, their expansion makes sense. For example, initial findings from Early Head Start indicate that a combination of center- and home-based interventions for teen parents improve the cognitive development of their toddlers, foster more effective interactions between parent and child, and increase parental return to school. Yet, Early Head Start now only serves a very small percentage of eligible families. (*Making a Difference in the Lives of Infants and Toddlers and Their Families*, Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, ACF, DHHS, 2002)
- **Convening critical stakeholders for a comprehensive approach.** Because the goal of early childhood success necessarily encompasses a wide array of service systems and partners, communities whose stakeholders work together will be at an advantage. *Improving School Readiness Outcomes* ([www.aecf.org/initiatives/mc/tarc/priority/education/school\\_readiness\\_summary.pdf](http://www.aecf.org/initiatives/mc/tarc/priority/education/school_readiness_summary.pdf)) describes how six communities have successfully brought stakeholders together around school readiness.

## Key Resources

- **Child Trends.** Researches and analyzes issues of early child development to inform policy and practice. ([www.childtrends.org](http://www.childtrends.org))
- **Children's Defense Fund.** Provides data, legislative analyses, and action guides in support of advocacy for improved child outcomes. ([www.childrensdefense.org](http://www.childrensdefense.org))
- **Human Services Workforce Initiative.** Addresses issues and seeks solutions regarding the preparation of, and reward structure for, frontline service providers, including preschool child care workers. ([www.aecf.org/initiatives/hswi](http://www.aecf.org/initiatives/hswi))



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