MATTERS

The SVP Early Learning Advocacy and Policy Committee wants every child to enter kindergarten ready for school. We believe that in order to make this happen, changes need to be made in our early learning system. We are advocating for these changes and we want other Partners to join us. The first step is to have other Partners understand what we have learned about early learning because real facts have propelled us to our position...ergo this document.

RESEARCH | FACTS | IMPLICATIONS

Five Reasons to Support Early Learning

1. Better Life for the Children
   Children who are in positive early learning environments do better in school; are more likely to finish high school; have higher median incomes as adults; and see lower rates of teen pregnancy, incarceration, and problems due to drug abuse. The benefits are greatest for at-risk kids. i

2. Community Stability
   Children with more education have higher earnings which strengthens the economy. At the same time, the community sees reduced costs for remedial education, criminal justice, and welfare. ii

3. Positive Impact on Business
   Parents need child care to work. Reliable, quality child care reduces absenteeism and increases productivity of working parents. iii

4. Social Justice
   Quality early learning programs for at-risk children help to break the welfare cycle and reduce the socio-economic gap in school readiness. iv

5. Overall Return on Investment
   Each dollar invested in early learning results in approximately 4 to 8 dollars of public savings.v

Why Are SVP Partners Talking to SVP Partners About Early Learning?

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85% — Percentage of a child’s brain that is developed by age 3.vi

<9% — Percentage of education funding focused on ages 0-3.vii
We’re Not Talking About Computers

According to the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), in Washington State, school-readiness is not about flash cards and computer literacy. School readiness is divided into five areas with very specific metrics for each. School readiness is about being healthy. It means a child has the motor skills to hold a pencil or ride a tricycle and the social and emotional skills to share toys or sit still to listen to a story. It requires that students approach learning with enthusiasm and that they can pay attention to and finish tasks. Language and cognitive skills such as the ability to recognize some letters, follow directions, count, and classify objects are also part of school readiness.

Everyone throws around the term school readiness. What does it mean?

Percentage of Entering Kindergarten Students Adequately Prepared in Specific Indicators


“Doomed” to Failure Before Kindergarten?

Rick Brandon from the Human Services Policy Center at UW studies early learning and school readiness and he paints a dismal picture: Only 25% of low-income children are ready for school. And unexpectedly, only 58% of middle-income children are considered ready for school. If children who start out behind stay behind, is the achievement gap really a preparation gap? And are these children “doomed” to failure before they start?

The children who are least likely to be school-ready (and therefore in danger of falling farther behind their peers) are those who have two or more socio-economic “risk factors” such as poverty, a single parent, unemployed or partially employed parents, disabled parents, mothers without a high school degree, or no parent fluent in English. In Washington State, approximately 23% of children age 0 to 5, or 190,000 children (as of 2005), had two or more of these risk factors.
Sheriffs, Police Chiefs, and Prosecutors Advocate—

Early Learning as Crime Prevention

Can you believe it? Sheriffs, police chiefs, and prosecutors from every county in Washington State want more investment in early learning. As Laura Wells, State Director of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids says, “These people want to fight crime and put dangerous criminals behind bars. But law enforcement officials know that once a crime has been committed, it’s really too late.” Young children are becoming delinquent teens or adult criminals because at-risk kids are not getting the right help from the beginning.\textsuperscript{xi}

What our law enforcement leaders know is that quality early learning and home coaching programs result in lower crime. One study, based on a federally funded program in Chicago, found that at-risk children without quality pre-kindergarten were 70% more likely to commit violent crimes than similarly situated children who did attend such a program. \textsuperscript{xiv} Another study shows that abused and neglected kids are much more likely to become violent. Children whose mothers received home coaching during their early years were 59% less likely to be arrested before the age of 15.\textsuperscript{xv}

Wells concluded that they are not about coddling families. They are about fighting crime and creating a safe nation, using every tool they can.

A Child Plays to Learn, Grandparents Learn to Play

How Family, Friend, and Neighbor Care Helps Isolated Caregivers

In Washington State, nearly 70% of kids who are in non-parental care are in what is called Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) care.\textsuperscript{xvi} Play and Learn groups are facilitated groups where caregivers—parents, grandparents, friends, or neighbors—can bring the children they are caring for and share in a rich play experience. The trained facilitators make sure that it is a learning experience for both the kids and the caregivers. This story is from the Chinese Information and Service Center.

May May is a three-year-old Chinese girl who has been attending this group for a year with her grandparents. When May May first joined, she was easily frustrated, refused to follow instructions, and frequently interrupted during circle time. She had very few words and often screamed. Her grandmother was frustrated as well, so there was little positive interaction between them.

The facilitators of the group learned that May May was spending six days a week with her grandparents in their senior housing development, where she was expected to stay calm and quiet all the time. They talked with the grandparents about what was to be expected from children May May’s age. They used the play and learn group to engage May May and shape her behavior. They provided ideas for activities May May and her grandparents could do at home. In Chinese culture, elders do not play with children, so the facilitators needed to respectfully introduce the concept of play and model how to do it.

Both May May and her grandparents made wonderful progress. May May’s vocabulary has grown and she rarely screams anymore. She relates more to the other children, can stay with the group without interrupting, and is calmer. The grandparents are much more focused on May May’s real needs.
The ability to learn is not something children gradually develop over time. Rather, infants are born learning according to Andy Meltzoff and Patricia Kuhl of the Institute for Learning and Brain Sciences (I-LABS) at the University of Washington.

During the first few years of life, human interaction is critical to a baby’s emotional, social, and intellectual development. Kuhl’s research focuses on language acquisition. She has shown that children do not learn language from television, video programs, or audio programs. Instead human interaction is required. Furthermore, she maintains that because babies are awake only a few hours a day, having children under age 2 watch TV or videos is a detriment because it decreases time interacting with parents and caregivers. Human interaction is essential for developing robust social and emotional skills—skills which are a better predictor of academic success than early cognitive abilities.

When it comes to school readiness for toddlers, parental and caregiver role models are critical. Meltzoff’s research demonstrates how toddlers look to adults for cues on behavior. These 3- to 5-year olds model behavior they see in adults and they avoid behavior they believe will cause an adult to be angry. Children who are encouraged to, will also develop self-restraint—a skill essential for success in school.

The public policy implications of the I-LABS research are important. Even though 85% of a child’s brain is developed by the age of three, less than 9% of public investment in education is targeted at this age group.

### Quiz Yourself

1. Nationally, what is the return on investment for every dollar invested in early learning?
2. What percent of eligible 4-year olds are reached by Head Start and ECEAP (Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program funded by the state) and what percent of 0- to 3-year olds are covered by Early Head Start?
3. What type of caregiver is used most frequently for infants and toddlers?
4. What is the average salary of a child care worker? A preschool teacher? A kindergarten teacher?
5. What percent of family child care homes and what percent of child care centers have accreditation?
6. How much training do you need to be a child care provider?
7. How much training do you need to be a cosmetologist or manicurist?
8. True or False: Children who come to school behind generally catch up in a few years.
9. Nationwide, multiproblem youth (those involved in multiple self-destructive behaviors) cost society how much annually?
10. True or False: In long-term studies, at-risk children who receive high-quality early learning have higher graduation rates, fewer arrests, and higher median annual incomes than those who received no preschool.
11. True or False: Noncognitive social, emotional, and behavioral skills don’t have much impact on a person’s success in life.

Answers on inside back cover.
How Do We Make It Work Economically?

The economics of licensed child care is complicated—parents cannot afford to pay more and providers barely earn a living wage. Better-educated providers and lower turnover leads to higher quality. But pay for child care providers is low, making it hard to attract and retain quality providers. In Washington State, a child care worker averages $18,900/year and a pre-school teacher averages $25,110/year. (Note the federal poverty level in 2007 for a family of one adult and two children was $17,190.)

A kindergarten teacher averages $42,680/year. If you raise wages to attract better-quality workers, the cost goes up. If a worker gets a BA and can teach kindergarten, she/he is likely to leave the field.

While parents want good quality for their kids, most—from low-income to middle-income families—can barely afford to pay for it. Only 4% of eligible 0-3 year olds are covered by the state Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (EACAP) and only 51% of eligible 4-year olds are covered by Head Start. Middle-income families do not receive any help. According to the Rick Brandon, PhD, of the Human Services Policy Center at UW, quality care costs 25% of net take-home pay per child for middle-income families in Washington State.

So how do we make it all work for families choosing licensed child care? According to Brandon, we make it work by spending wisely and thinking over the long term. Brandon takes a pragmatic approach. What can we get passed in the legislature and what is the minimum quality necessary to impact outcomes? On the provider side, he suggests that we target a compensation level that is the minimum to recruit and retain qualified staff and that we provide incentives to improve quality. On the parent side, Brandon proposes using the approach currently used for higher education. A portion of the cost of child care is paid by the state for all children regardless of income and the remainder is charged as tuition with income-related scholarships. This model keeps middle-income families from being priced out.

Brandon says that over the long-term, the investment in quality care pays off. He looks at ROI in two ways. Direct returns include higher earning and economic growth due to better education and reduced public costs in the areas of remedial education, criminal justice, and welfare. Indirect returns include a stronger local economy due to a more educated and skilled workforce and more cash circulating in the economy due to better paid staff spending more. Brandon put forward that we could see an increase in GDP of 1% by 2050 or $2.5 billion. The cost for increasing quality he estimates to be $400-800 million which is only 5-10% of current K-12 funding. So for a relatively small investment, we can see a huge impact over the long term.
what’s IN | what’s OUT
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**Partnerships**
Washington State has a long tradition of cooperation in the child care arena, but partnerships have reached new levels with Thrive by Five Washington, a statewide public-private partnership started in 2006. Thrive’s mission is to see every child ready for school and successful in life. This partnership includes the Department of Early Learning as well as some of the top philanthropies in the state. Now the Early Learning Advocacy Table has started under the auspices of the Children’s Alliance. The goal of this group is to have early learning advocates speak with one voice.

**Focus in Government**
In 2006, the state legislature approved the creation of the Department of Early Learning to coordinate state-funded early learning programs and policy recommendations. Previously, these programs were housed in many different departments, making coordination difficult.

**Giving Parents Real Recommendations**
Thrive by Five Washington and the Department of Early Learning have funded demonstration communities to pilot and evaluate early learning practices and then take the best ones and replicate them across the state. Included in these pilots is a Quality Rating and Improvement System to rate child care providers and then provide incentives for providers to improve and move up the scale. QRIS will help parents know which providers are the best and should increase demand for quality.

**Unions**
The Service Employees International Union, SEIU, won the right for family child care workers to unionize. But this is unionization with a twist. It’s not worker vs. directors, but workers and directors together working for higher subsidy rates and more professional pay. Subsidies paid by the state generally do not cover the full cost of quality child care, sometimes paying as little as 70% of the actual cost.

**Reaching Kids Where They Are**
Parents make different choices for their kids and make different choices at different ages. The Department of Early, Thrive by Five, and other funders in Washington State want to have all kids ready for success in school and life, which means working with families and kids “where they are,” whether parents keep children at home; put them in licensed care; use family, friend, or neighbor care; or use some combination. Making the most impact requires building a statewide system that supports diverse communities, families, and caregivers in appropriate ways.

**Unexpected Advocates**
Used to be that only providers were speaking up. But now some very unexpected advocates are joining in. Fight Crime: Invest in Kids is an anticrime organization of more than 3,000 police chiefs, prosecutors, and other law enforcement leaders who advocate for high quality early education and home visiting. Docs for Tots is engaging physicians to speak out for early learning. Businesses such as Boeing, ClearChannel, and others are also joining in.
Five Steps Each of Us Can Take to Support Quality Early Learning for All Children

1. Learn More. Visit These Websites.
   • Thrive by Five Washington: www.thrivebyfivewa.org
   • Washington State Child Care Resource and Referral Network: www.childcarenet.org
   • Human Services Policy Center: www.hspc.org
   • Washington State Department of Early Learning: www.del.wa.gov
   • Talaris: www.talaris.org

2. Support.
   Dozens of organizations are working to improve the quality of child care. They need your support.

3. Volunteer.
   Volunteer at a child care program where you can read to kids and help teachers in other ways. The United Way of King County has a program where you can volunteer to read to kids. Children's Home Society and Volunteers of America Western Washington also have opportunities to work with young children.

4. Start at Home.
   If you are a parent, don’t forget your own kids. Read to them. Talk to them. Play with them. Encourage exploration. Limit TV. And demand quality of your own child care or preschool.

5. Advocate.
   Being an advocate means speaking up. You can build awareness by talking to your neighbors, family, and co-workers. Find out what your company does—does it support families by offering flexible schedules, on-site child care, or even a child care referral line? Get your company to support better child care. And finally, talk to your elected officials. Make sure they know that quality early learning is important to you.

Answers to the Quiz

1. Nationally, the return on investment for every dollar invested in early learning is $4-$8 and includes savings in decreased special education, remediation, welfare, and crime. xxviii
2. 51% percent of eligible 4-year olds are reached by Head Start and ECEAP (Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program funded by the state) and 4% of 0- to 3-year olds are covered by Early Head Start. xxx
3. Grandparents, aunts, uncles, other relatives, friends, or neighbors (family, friend, and neighbor care providers) provide more nonparental child care for infants and toddlers in Washington State than do licensed child care programs or homes. xxxi
4. The average salary of a child care worker is $18,900/year; the average for a preschool teacher is $25,100/year. The average salary of a kindergarten teacher is $42,680/year. xxxi
5. 0.3% of family child care homes and 9.5% of child care centers have accreditation. xxxi
6. A child care provider needs current CPR, First Aid, and HIV/Aids training, plus 20 hours of basic training the first year of being licensed and 10 hours each additional year. xxxv
7. A cosmetologist needs 1600 hours of training and a manicurist needs 600 hours. xxxvi
8. False. Children who start out behind in school are unlikely to catch up academically. xxxvii
9. Multiproblem youth cost society an estimated $335 to $350 billion annually. xxxviii
10. True. In long-term studies, at-risk children who receive high-quality early learning have higher graduation rates, fewer arrests, and higher median annual incomes than those who received no preschool. xxxix
11. False. Noncognitive social, emotional, and behavioral skills lead to greater motivation, self-discipline, and persistence which have an important and lasting impact on a person’s success in life. xl
Washington State has 330,000 young children. Must 329,999 wait while we help only one child at a time? Why not help all Washington’s children? Advocate for systemic change.