

A Strong Start Makes a Difference



Teachers & Parents share
powerful stories about the importance
of high quality early learning.

About the Campaign

The Strong Start for Children - Building America's Future Campaign is an ever-expanding, diverse effort of national, state, and local groups united in support of increased federal early childhood investments and the President's Preschool Proposal, which would expand access to high-quality early learning opportunities for low-and moderate-income children and families. The Campaign has three goals: increase public awareness about the importance of the early years to a child's success in school and in life, build support among public officials for greater investments in early learning, and expand the voices of support for young children and their families.

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American Federation of Teachers
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Home Instruction for Parents
of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY)
Jumpstart
MomsRising
National Association for the Education
of Young Children (NAEYC)
National Education Association
National Head Start Association
National Women's Law Center
ReadyNation
Zero to Three

Dear Senator,

Early Learning! Lots of people are talking about it and we wanted to hear from the educators and parents who regularly witness the powerful effects of high-quality early learning. We asked individuals across the country to tell us about their experiences and what early learning has meant to the children in their lives.

In this book you'll find firsthand stories from preschool teachers, early-care providers, home visitors, parents, elementary-school teachers, and business leaders from across the country. Every day many of these individuals are on the ground working with children. They are the best eye witnesses to the results of high-quality early learning, and their stories show how an excellent early learning experience can unlock a child's potential.

Unfortunately hundreds of thousands of American children do not get to experience high-quality early learning. To change that harsh reality, a plan has been proposed to help children get a strong start. This historic plan will make high-quality prekindergarten available for low- and moderate-income 4-year-olds, increase the availability of high-quality child care options for infants and toddlers through partnerships between Early Head Start and child care, and expand voluntary home visiting. This is a bold step toward ensuring that all of our children succeed in school and in life.

These stories will show you just how much high-quality early learning can accomplish for children and families. We look forward to working with you and your colleagues to expand access to these opportunities for America's most vulnerable children.

Sincerely,



The Strong Start for Children Campaign

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Alabama

When addressing issues of equity, it is important to realize that some of the achievement gaps can be attributed to gaps in access that arose before Kindergarten. As a nation, we would be remiss if we allow students to enter into the educational arena behind their peers because of their zip code.

Alison Grizzle
Birmingham, Alabama

My oldest daughter is a product of participating in Head Start. She is an advanced diploma honor high school graduate, honor college student, full-time employed, volunteer with various community projects i.e., assist senior citizens, clean neighborhood, read to children, active church member, as well as a youth motivational speaker. She participated in a Head Start Program for two years, our family encountered an extremely positive educational and supportive experience. She really enjoyed the caring/nurturing, cognitive and social/emotional development; for more than fifteen years later, she remembered her teacher's name. I felt a little embarrassed that I forgot her Head Start teacher's name. As the mother, I should have remembered that. I am proud that my daughter's teacher had such a positive impact on her at age three and four that she would remember her full name.

Angela Seay
Greenville, Alabama

She participated in a Head Start Program for two years, our family encountered an extremely positive educational and supportive experience.

My 6 year old suffered from chronic ear infections from age 4 months until age 5. The inability to hear well contributed to a diagnosis of developmental delay. Thankfully, due to a teacher I had when I studied for my AAS in Early Childhood Education, I knew exactly what to do to give him the extra boost I knew he would need. We enrolled him in Just 4 Developmentally Laboratory School, Mobile, AL. He received speech, one on one instruction and other early intervention services to help him gain the kindergarten skills he would need. I was so happy with the education he received at that school. His kindergarten year was successful because of it. He will begin 1st grade next week and while he is still in need of extra supports, I know he is better than what he would have been without Just 4.

Latrece Johnson
Mobile, Alabama

Thank god for the state of Alabama helping me with child care!! Because of them I was able to go to school and graduate. Child care was going to be a hardship due to the fact that I didn't have too much of a support group when my children were really young.

Sonya McCollum
Mobile, Alabama

My husband and I have 6 kids ages 2-16. We can't afford not to work. Even with each of us working full time, we can't afford childcare. We are also taking care of our 17 year old nephew. We don't need cuts. We need more childcare. The waiting lists are unbelievable. Alabama needs pre-K. All children deserve an education as early as possible. It is just so expensive and there are not enough Head Starts and Early Head Starts in Alabama. Please help.

Felicia Eicher
Phenix City, Alabama



Alaska

I moved here to Sitka, Alaska in 2004 to go to Sheldon Jackson College to get my elementary education teaching degree. Unfortunately, when I finished my junior year in 2007, the school closed because it was bankrupt, and I was never able to finish my degree, and I am still unemployed and seriously running out of money. However, with one of my first education classes, we had to do 18 hours of service learning, and I started volunteering in the library before school opened at the local K and 1st grade elementary school, reading and supporting the kids who were reading and looking at books and magazines. I enjoyed it so much that when my 18 hours were over, I continued volunteering, and now, in 2013, continue to this day, five days a week. I have seen the kids come and go, as they grow up, and I hope they continue their love for looking at and reading books. It has been so much fun to share my love of books with “my” kids, asking them questions about the pictures, their thoughts about the book, what their day was like...I could read at an early age, and I am realizing how important it is to start kids early with books, even if all they do is look at the picture. Reading is vital to just about everything you do as you grow into adulthood, and I am glad that I have had a chance to help to make that happen.

Lynda Strong
Sitka, Alaska

I teach Gifted and Talented students in Alaska and I regularly ask the students and parents when they are entered into the program if they had any preschool education before they entered Kindergarten. Almost 95% of all my G/T students attended preschool and many are from low income parents. It always makes me wonder how many more students would be identified as G/T if every student had a high quality early childhood education.

Ruth Knight Valdez
Alaska

I am a high school special education teacher in Alaska. We are so very happy to have Head Start in our village. The children love going to school, and the parents (mostly Native Alaskans) are supportive and want their children to do well. I know how important an early childhood education is for these students because I've seen what happens without it. We get students transferring in for many places and the ones who have had preschool have a “head start” on their education. It is obvious to me that starting early prevents or ameliorates a lot of problems later on. Once students are in high school, having experienced years of avoiding behaviors, failure and frustration, it is harder to turn things around. Good teaching, early on, is what is helping to make learning accessible to lots of kids. And because it is accessible for them, attendance is improving and the students are eager to learn their whole lives.

Patricia Engen
Alaska

**I am realizing how important
it is to start kids early with books,
even if all they do is look at the picture.
Reading is vital to just about
everything you do as you grow
into adulthood.**

Arizona

Both of my boys attended Lincoln Learning Center (“LLC”) in Phoenix, Arizona. LLC is a well-established daycare center as it has been around since the 1930s. It is NAEYC-accredited, an accreditation that very few other daycare centers in the area have. Despite the distance to our home, we made the commitment to send our kids to LLC since they were both 6 months old because we felt that LLC’s structured early childhood development programs combined with the length of tenure of the teachers would highly benefit our children. We were correct. Our children are extremely intelligent - academically, socially and emotionally. The great care and education they received from well-trained teachers and well-established teachers helped them to develop in ways that we did not imagine. Considering that studies have shown that a person’s brain is 90% developed by age 5, I strongly believe that access to great early learning programs is imperative.

Almira Baker
Arizona

In 2001 I was the Assistant Director for the USAF Child Development Program in Tucson. I was on a career track and had plans to someday retire, when I was given an opportunity to open a brand new childcare program in the Vail School District. I had been taking college classes on the Reggio Approach and saw this as an opportunity to create a high-quality, joyful program. I took a cut in pay and lost many benefits, but I knew the potential to create something amazing for children would be great. Environments are a big part of the Reggio Approach so I created beautiful, home like spaces for children that were full of wondrous, natural materials. Reggio states, the environment is the “third teacher.” I hired a dynamic team of teachers and we were ready to open. I was able to create the program I envisioned. The one caveat was that I must make sure the Special Education teachers were happy with the program. Special Education was a different department at that time, and their teach-

ers would visit our classrooms to serve their children which were included in our program. On the day before opening, the S.E. teacher stormed my office, pointed her finger in my face and exclaimed, “These environments will not work for my children with special needs, they will be too stimulating!” I saw my career flash before my eyes, I had made a terrible mistake. I calmed myself, and asked her if she would just give me one week, let her children come to the program, and at the end of the week she could come and tell me what wasn’t working. The week passed quickly and she was soon at my desk again. This time she stood with tears dripping from her eyes and said, “I owe you the biggest apology, my children do so well here, I can work with them without first needing to get past behavioral challenges.” And then she made a statement that has stayed with me these past 12 years, a statement that has held me firm in my beliefs. With tears falling onto my desk she said, “My children are at peace here.”

Sharon Taddeo
Arizona

What do you do when you are a working mother and you don’t have a reliable person to child sit? You look for a good, safe child care facility. But paying for it is a real burden. We had five children, and I always worked at the telephone company. If it had not been for good child care, and the help we got from special childcare programs, I would not have been able to work and contribute to the welfare of my family. My husband was in construction, so his income greatly fluctuated! This is not a luxury, it is real life for working couples with children. Please, don’t dismantle these vital programs!

Lucy Prince
Vail, Arizona



Quality early-child education should be a right and not a luxury.

I was lucky enough to find excellent child care for my daughter when I decided to finish my education. I now am a full time wife and mother, a full time student, and I also work part time to cover my daughter's tuition, which is about three times what I pay for mine! It's worth every penny to ensure that she is well cared for by honest and upstanding individuals who are studying the field of child development, but it's definitely hard on our budget. Quality early-child education should be a right and not a luxury, but unfortunately our country isn't quite there yet....

Sandra Hurraw
Yuma, Arizona

I see children and families who come to our school with a variety of challenges - many of which would put the children in the "at-risk" category - poverty, lack of education of parents, lack of jobs for parents, behavioral and social-emotional challenges.

With the intensive planning, direction, and care by adults who know what they are doing, I see these children succeeding in elementary, high school and beyond. Their parents learn how to address the challenges of raising children, the kids learn how to take initiative, to work with others, to respect all in the community, to learn independently. These are all essential skills.

Our "at-risk" graduates go on to success. After 20 years, we see many going off to college - one to the Naval Academy a couple of years ago. Before he left for the Academy, he came back to his preschool and kindergarten to teach the current kindergartners how to make paper airplanes that really fly.

Early education programs work!

Early Childhood Education Center Board Member
Phoenix, Arizona

As an educator in a predominantly poor district, I have seen first-hand what early childhood programs provide in the way of academic preparedness, as well as socialization for countless kids, who would've had a difficult transition to grade school, to say the least. Before these programs were put in place, many kids entered Kindergarten (myself included) and experienced "culture shock". Not all are lucky enough to adjust as smoothly as some, especially if they are coming from impoverished environments. I have seen Kindergarten-aged kids being pulled from all-day Kinder programs, because they were "immature", lacking the coping mechanisms and social/academic experiences to prepare them for this very important transition. They end up coming back later, but at a significant disadvantage to their peers.

Veronica Noyce
Arizona

The great care and education they received from well-trained teachers and well-established teachers helped them to develop in ways that we did not imagine.

Arkansas

I was a Head Start child and it was such a positive experience. I'm thankful that I was given that opportunity. It has helped me become a stronger person who is able to confront any issues and continue to further my education. I have been able to complete two bachelor degrees and I am now in my second year of graduate school for public administration. I currently work full time on a home visiting project that has enabled me to motivate and share my story. Early childhood education is a gift that keeps on giving, but only if every family and child has the opportunity.

Nichetra Magee
Arkansas

I am writing in support of home-based and home visiting education. I worked as Program Director for Home Instruction Program for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) for ten years. I found it to be a wonderful program from which parents and children could benefit. Parents were provided teaching materials and curriculum to work with their preschool children at home. Home-based educators or home visitors would deliver the materials to the parent, then sit down with the parent and teach the lesson to parent in the exact manner the parent was to teach his or her child. The purpose was to increase the number of children that entered kindergarten ready to learn, and to empower the parent as the first teacher of his or her child.

After ten years with the program, I was offered a job in the local school system as a Spanish teacher. I live in a twin-city area. I worked for HIPPY on the Arkansas side of the city, but was offered the teaching position on the Texas side of the city. In this area, it is common for families to move back and forth across the state lines for business and personal needs. As ninth graders began to appear in my class, I began to recognize names. At first, I could not understand why these children had names that were recognizable, and I thought they may have been children who had once attended my church.

While reading the honor rolls that are printed in our local newspaper, I realized that I recognized most of the names on the list. Suddenly, it occurred to me! All of the names that I recognized were children who were participants in HIPPY. I began to seek out the few children who had migrated to the Texas side of the city. After questioning these high achievers, I realized that they all had participated in HIPPY. They could still remember the games, activities and fun the program offered. I was and still am amazed at the success rate of students from families that participated in HIPPY.

Giving parents the tools to become the best advocate for their children is essential to the educational welfare of the children. I am sure that other states can boast the same results, if they were to investigate or track the lives of HIPPY children. A program with this kind of potential should never be destroyed. It should be given the financial backing and support that would ensure that our schools will graduate students who are successful and will continue successfully to become the leaders and decision makers of our great nation.

Betty Yarber
Texarkana, Arkansas

Our preschool has had the privilege of working with the HIPPY staff to unite our families with their services. I can definitely tell there has been a positive impact on our families because of the HIPPY program, especially this past year. Our preschool services the children, but more often than not, the problems we deal with at school are also problems in the home. Parents do not have any direction on where to go if there are questions or needs in the home. HIPPY provides resources and positive options for them. Parents have made many comments on how pleased they are with the HIPPY staff that comes and sees them. Comments includes that she never judges them. She offers good advice and she shows them things to do with their children.



Our parents need good role models and they need someone they can trust to so call “point them in the right direction” with suggestions on how to deal with their child’s behavior at home or how to help their child learn in the home. Through the HIPPY program, we have also found preschool students to enroll in our early childhood program. Our program is for underprivileged and special needs children, and occasionally these children are referred to us by HIPPY. We provide services for the students while they service the family in the home.

Without HIPPY there would be a vital piece missing in the puzzle. The puzzle we are trying to help put together; and that is to help families at home so children will have a functional home life which in turn will positively affect students at school and prepare them for a successful journey through LIFE.

Please see that HIPPY is a positive program. Please see that it is in the best interest of children and their families. Without it there are children that live in terrible places that you and I will never know about . . . but the HIPPY staff does. They find these children and they make a difference by being there for the parent(s) and family, so they have someone to look to for help when they feel lost and discouraged, and when they feel like giving up.

Sherrie McAdams
Ashdown, Arkansas

Before my grandson and I started using the HIPPY Program, I had extreme difficulty with getting him interested in learning anything. Even at preschool he did not participate in many activities. I had concerns if I would even be able to get Kriston to do the HIPPY lessons with me.

When we first started the first lesson, he was apprehensive but curious, and by the second week it was a breeze. Kriston now looked forward to working on his lessons, and many times brought hippy bag to me asking to get started. After he gained the needed con-

fidence he received by doing his HIPPY homework, as we call it, he has now impressed his preschool teachers as well as myself with all he has learned. Kriston will be the youngest child in his kindergarten class. With the great instruction I received from my HIPPY teacher, I feel my grandson has the ability to keep up.

The weekly lessons were great; they gave me the tools I so badly needed to help Kriston learn the necessary skills he needs to start school. To Kriston, HIPPY is fun. He loved doing the worksheets, the games, the science projects and all the books. The best part is he didn’t look at it as learning, but he did learn so much.

We will always be grateful to my wonderful instructor, who did a great job of walking me through each lesson with skills and patience. I wish I had known of HIPPY when Krsiton was three so we could have started sooner. I tell everyone I know about HIPPY and will continue to do so. I pray that the HIPPY Program will be able to help parents with their children’s early learning development for many years to come. It has truly been a blessing for us.

Thank you for all that you do!

Dorothy Heithman
Hot Springs, Arkansas

I adopted my son out of the foster care system. My son attended Head Start as a three and four-year-old. When he was two he was tested and developmental delays were diagnosed. My son benefited from the head start program both academically and socially. Today he is a second-grader who has no delays and as a first grader was on honor roll all year. I am an educator in Arkansas and I teach middle school. I see the benefits of Head start programs both professionally and personally. Head start programs are important for young children to develop their love of learning to carry them through their entire academic career.

Kimberly Jones
Arkansas



California

I will never forget the Parents As Teachers volunteer in Missouri who helped me so much for several years after my daughter was born. I had read almost every book about pregnancy and newborns, but had little first-hand experience with infants. She was reassuring and had intelligent advice and gave me guidance when I would have had none. She helped me understand that learning should be fun for both mother and baby.

Richelle Witt
Camarillo, California

My name is Mary Nella Gonzales. Over a period of 36 years I taught in Kinder for 2 years, as a teacher's Aid in grade three, and for 5 years in elementary School. For the remainder of my 22 years in elementary education, I was a Curriculum Specialist. Students from high quality early learning programs prepared the students for reading. This was not done by forcing them to read, but rather by helping them to develop their visual skills through movement in dance and other activities, such as selecting and threading beads of certain colors, which also developed their small muscle skills. Their critical thinking skills, through language development, and of course they had paperwork. These skills are necessary for the child to develop strong reading skills. Early learning programs are an absolute necessity for our children. Later, teaching at the university level, it was very obvious to me that students with those critical skills seemed to succeed at a faster pace.

Mary Nella Gonzales
Bakersfield, California

When I enter a high quality early childhood program I see children working together on projects and tasks that engage them. I see bright eyes and focused concentration as children try out new ideas. I hear cheerful voices as children talk about what they are doing and share ideas. I see creative critical thinkers in the making.

Rachel Samoff
Palo Alto, California

Oh, Brown Bear, Brown Bear, what do you see? (from Health Manager from Head Start Program) I see..... how sensory screenings to children with special needs, limited speech, or no language can make a difference with their school readiness skills. The beauty of Head Start requirements to conduct auditory and visual screenings from 0 to 5 is that it provides the child and family an extra window of opportunity to be educated on the importance of these functions and if needed, obtain preventative care and resources. We hear it in the news and we see it in our forms. Clinics and medical offices are pushed to a 15 minute limit and often, children are not screened at this critical age because they are labeled, "too young or too difficult" to screen. As a screener, I know the challenges a family can have in getting a child to listen or sit still. I see the challenges a child might have in following directions or understanding what I'm asking of them to do. I see how difficult it might be for an autistic child to have a tool placed in their ear or follow a two-step direction while the mother is crying and apologizing for her child's behavior. All of this and we continue to move mountains. We accommodate and are flexible. We try and try again because we know that this extra opportunity can be fruitful. The time and flexibility provided can allow a child to get a hearing aid or glasses sooner. It can allow a family to communicate and reduce stress and stigma. We know therefore we do, and we fight to keep providing this care to give every child that walks through our door another chance to succeed. (from Disabilities Manager at Head Start



program) I see that head start programs provide an array of opportunities to children with disabilities to be included with typical children to develop their social-emotional skills and language. I see that the interaction of children with disabilities with typical peers in an inclusion setting has shown that these children learn a lot from peer modeling and it also helps typical children to understand better their peer's disability. I see that all Head start parents are provided the opportunity to learn about their rights and responsibilities and they receive the support and assistance from highly trained personnel in the field of disabilities. Parents learn that there are many resources in the community to assist them in caring for a child with disabilities. I see that as a comprehensive program, head start families are provided with information in the areas of nutrition, health, mental health, disabilities and family services that can support them as they embark in their educational journey with their child.

Christina Preuss
Chatsworth, California

As a mom with two small children, I was able to go back to school and get a BS degree. I could not have done it without high quality preschool and child care. Fast-forward and I am a pre-k teacher giving back to the community every day. I am also working with high school students who want to become teachers. I have been working at the same site for over 25 years and have never "worked" a day in my life because I love my job and the community that I work in.

Arlene Riddick
Pico Rivera, California

My name is Cathy Gaeta I work as an Early Head Start educator servicing children from birth to three in a center-based program for Plaza De La Raza Child development services Inc. in Pico Rivera, California for 13 years. I have a child by the name of Jacob who has been in the Early Head Start program since he was nine months. When he was about seventeen months I sat with his mom and discussed Jacob's overall development. But the area of concern was language and communication. He would just point, shake head but rarely babbled or made sounds. We provided activities for parents to enhance their child's development in language and communication. Finally Jacob's parent agreed to have him assessed. He did not qualify for services but his parents decided to appeal the decision and shared with me that her other son had speech delays and is having a difficult time in elementary school and they had to fight for services.

His parents did not want Jacob to go through the same issues when he got to elementary school. It was a continuous fight with medical providers and the regional center to provide Jacob with speech services by assisting and educating parents in their rights for getting services for Jacob. Finally after over a year Jacob is now receiving speech services and both parents have expressed and shown their gratitude in helping them and continuing to work with their child in enhancing his speech. His dad brought me and my coworker, Norma, lunch and his mother has expressed how Jacob has learned a lot more at Plaza Bloomfield EHS than her other son did when he was in Head Start. I never realized the impact we had in Jacob's life and the other toddlers we service. Jacob is now 32 months and will be transitioning into Head Start. He can say three to four word sentences, express his needs through language, communicate to peers when he wants them to stop, and greet. He recognizes his name when he hears it and is able to say his first name, and the names of peers and caregivers. Jacob is an example of the type of children we service. It

allows caregivers to continue the hard work we put into the children and families we serve, even though at times we feel under paid and unappreciated by our administrators, parents and politicians who are cutting funds in education without realizing Early Head Start is the foundation of later school readiness.

Cathy Gaeta
Montebello, California

Our school is truly an oasis for children to learn and develop and we are located in East Oakland, CA. As a Title I school with Provision 2 status (100% of students have Free Breakfast/Lunch), we have 20% African American, 73% Latino, and 2% Asian/Pacific, 2% Multiracial, 2% White, 1% "Other". Sixty-seven percent of our children are English Language Learners. And yet...we are having remarkable success because we believe that education "Starts with Self, is Guided by Families, Engaged in Community, and Rooted in Ancestors." We strive to reach the whole child, and as a result, our students thrive through a culturally-responsive, empowering, and caring school culture with deep relationships, personal attention, data-driven and standards-based learning, family/school partnerships, music, visual arts, gardening, fitness and technology. We know that our strategic partnerships with education experts, like Dr. Dan Yang, creator of VINCI Blended Learning Curriculum, our early learning program provides our students with cutting edge curriculum that Integrates the best of both digital and traditional learning.

Minh-Tram Nguyen
California

I teach at an elementary school in a disadvantaged neighborhood. Although I have never taught a grade lower than second grade, I nearly always can tell which students have completed SRLDP at my school, because they are generally the best students in my

classes. From being able to sit, listen, and respond to a story, to respecting their fellow classmates, students who have had the benefit of SRLDP show the advantages of pre-K education. This phenomenon was still detectable among the 5th graders I taught, years after SRLDP completion. Other teachers at my school have mentioned that they noticed the same thing.

William Niemand
Downey, California

When I began my second my year of teaching, I knew that it was going to be a challenging year. My first year was rough, to put it lightly. But I had a renewed energy for the second year ambitious goals of stepping out of my comfort zone to engage families, new songs and rhymes to keep me on my toes, and some ideas for achieving the academic goals I wanted to focus on in my classroom. I was a perfect mix of anxious, hopeful, and nervous about having the youngest babies in the building (young 3 year olds and four older 2 year olds), and excited about what I hoped would be an amazing year. The year was indeed amazing full of ups and downs.

Ups like the average gain we achieved in letter ID from 5.33 letters in August to 22.81 in May. Downs like the scraped knees from falling off a playground structure. Ups like the fun field trips we took to the pumpkin patch, the National Zoo, Air and Space Museum, Museum of Natural History, and the National Children's Museum. Downs like the handful of times we had to send students home for aggressive behavior like biting and hitting. Ups like the gratitude parents showed when we gave them targeted resources to help their child at home with specific skills they struggled with. Downs like the days of mayhem we faced when a child's home life was unsteady and unpredictable. Despite the challenges, I would not trade my year of teaching for any other experience. Because I had a high-quality learning environment to support my teaching, I was able to be the best teacher

I could be that year. Without the funding, instructional support, and school culture to create high-quality learning experiences, my students would not have had a full year of preschool to play, learn, explore, and develop to their potential. Far too many children in America lack access to these experiences, and it is simply unfair. High-quality early learning is transformative and imperative.

Ashley Chu
San Francisco, CA

My name is Ruben Siguenza. I'm a Head Start Teacher in Los Angeles, CA. I became a teacher because I wanted to give something back to my community. I was encouraged by my high school teachers to go to college. They were my mentors and really helped me in any which way they could possible help. Now I do the same with the families we serve. I encourage parents to go back to school, either to learn English or continue with their education. Some have gone back to school and graduated and every so often they come back and thank me not only for teaching their children but for encouraging and empowering them to go back to school. Also, when they come back to visit they share how their children are doing in school and all the certificates they are getting in school. They are so thankful that their children were in Head Start and now they are doing great in grade school. We have parents who are second and third generations who have been part of Head Start and they love the program. Head Start works. We teachers prepare children for Kindergarten but far more, we prepare them for life. Head Start is the foundation for education. We build strong children, strong families, and strong communities. I ask you to please help us continue building strong communities and keep funding Head Start. Thank you!

Ruben Siguenza
El Monte, California

A student I worked with named Alana started in our Head Start program at the beginning of October 2012. Her mother had previously enrolled Alana in at least three other programs. Alana's mother was desperate, because she couldn't handle her behavior. She didn't follow routines, follow directions, or stay still. She also repeated constantly what others asked her. My partner teacher, Nicole Johnson, and I referred Alana for an evaluation. Alana's mother was having problems accepting the referral and the process. We met several times with both parents to avoid Alana being dropped from the program. We were able to convince them and walk them through the process of the evaluation. Alana was finally diagnosed with Autism and ADD. We were so happy to hear that Alana was going to get the right program for her in Kindergarten. Both of her parents were really thankful that they finally were able to understand and handle Alana.

Gloria Garcia
Los Angeles, California

I see pre-kindergartners who love books because we are reading to them daily and providing them with advance language to build on their imaginations. I also see teachers encouraging parents to build on language and literacy skills at home for all students including second language learners.

Kimberly Barrow
California

I recently ran into a former student with her mom and grandma. She was in my pre k class 20 years ago and is studying to be a nurse because she wants to help young children. She is one of the four children I had in my class from that family. Her mom and grandma told me all are still bilingual because I insisted it was important to their futures to keep their language as well as learning English. The others are going to go to college and will qualify for scholarships as they all maintain 3.8 or higher GPAs. They attributed that to

having been in my class and the help I had given them and their single mom. This is one of many students and families that have told me of the positive long term impact early education has had in their lives.

Lidia Baranda Larin
San Francisco, California

I am a single mother with four children. My second oldest was the only child that was not able to attend preschool. She continues to struggle with school and she is currently in the 5th grade. It is very important for our children to get started early with learning. I hope you continue to help our children grow with a good education from the start because that's really makes a difference. I was not able to afford for her to go to preschool and yet make too much her to attend a state preschool. As a working struggling mother affordable childcare and preschools are very important. I am not on welfare and do my best to support my kids and every bit helps.

Misty Castro Fresno
California

I know that the work that I do makes a difference. Though I am now an administrator, I work with the people who work directly with children and those who care for them. Our work consists of giving parents and child care providers the tools that they need to raise a new generation of citizens who are loved, supported, and ready to learn.

There are those families who come to us in such disarray that we can only hope that they will stick with the program. Some come through child welfare or drug recovery programs and have fragile lives that we do what we can to stabilize. Watching families struggle to overcome these overwhelming obstacles renews my faith in the human spirit.

Watching children learn to interact with one another is one of the most joyous experiences I have had working here. Parents can be very quick to jump in and solve problems, especially in very young children. We help the parent to hold back, to wait and see what the child does and not step in until he starts to get frustrated. Parents are often amazed by what the children can work out among themselves.

Early Childhood Administrator
Napa, California

Without access to child care payment assistance, my life would not be where it is today. Parents like me who seek to further their education are doing so to advance in life, and assistance with childcare allows them to focus in school and not rely on student loans to pay for their childcare like I had to do last semester. Child care is oftentimes my biggest expense and it is so difficult to find quality care especially for single parents. By being part of the subsidized program, I was able to stress importance of family values to my son. It is so important to enforce stability to children 0-5, this is when they are learning the most and are shaped for the rest of their lives. I have been able to become self-sufficient and have completed my degree. I will be taking the lessons I have learned along the way and build a better future for myself and my son.

Parent
Stockton, California

As a former early childhood teacher I taught and introduced many children to the world of literacy and love of education.

I would go out of my way to find books in the children's native tongues so that they could have ownership of their classroom, which then helped them to find ways to succeed.

One of my parents who I have kept in touch with has just notified me that her son has just received his Ph.D. from UC Berkeley.

I also served on the San Diego AEYC's, and California's AEYC Board of Directors and found Head Start and other programs serving children did a world of good on so many levels.

Jay Price
San Diego, California

My name is Ana Bueno and I am a resident of Guadalupe, California. I would like to share a little of my story. I came into the United States at age sixteen. I came here as many migrant people that come looking for something better. Also, my parents were on the verge of separation because my dad's alcoholism. There was a lot of psychological violence from my father towards my mother. As a consequence, I got married and became pregnant at an early age. I started working in the fields for around six years because of need. After that, I started school.

I went into the community college and pursued a career in Education. It was a long journey. I faced many challenges throughout that time. My family broke apart and I became a single mother. It was the biggest challenge in my life. I had to work night shifts and two jobs at the same time to be able to pay bills, rent, and to support my child. It was very hard at the beginning but I learned to handle it. In 2005, I came aboard into the HIPPY Program. This is the best thing it could happen to me. Even though Guadalupe is a very small town of about 8,000 people, we are very fortunate to have HIPPY as there are not much preschool centers to cover the needs of the community. In HIPPY, we have the opportunity to serve around 45 families every year. I have the opportunity to work with a case load of 25 families each year. I have been a home educator in the HIPPY Program for the past eight years. First of all, HIPPY has the entire necessary element to teach parents how to prepare their own children to be ready for

school. Also, it has a curriculum where we cover areas of fine motor skills, large muscles, communication, socialization, and critical thinking. In addition, parents are also able to learn new skills, habits, and strategies to work with their children.

During home visitations, we are able to make a connection with the families and see their needs as well as barriers. Moreover, we can help them get access to agencies and receive services to cover their needs. As another component we held community group meetings in which we have speakers from different agencies come to talk about their agency and the services they provide. Also, parents learn to empower themselves and become leaders in the community. For example, we have HIPPY parents working in the Mary Buren Elementary and Kermit McKenzie Junior High School in town. As you can see, HIPPY has been helping parents overcome many obstacles, barriers and also to succeed in life. I personally feel very proud to be a part of it because I can reflect myself on those families and I think I can help by making a difference in their lives.

Ana Bueno
Guadalupe, California

At the beginning of the year, I had a little girl in my classroom who only spoke Spanish, according to the classroom teachers. She was shy and quiet, and only nodded "yes" and "no" when asked a question. She rarely spoke, and when she did speak, it was to the teachers, and it was in Spanish. Through the fall semester, she started to warm up to her Corps member, Emily, and started answering the questions Emily would ask during reading. By the end of the year, she was confident in everything she did: answering questions in circle time, playing in Dramatic Play, and writing her name (first and last, I might add). This child

went from being a shy, Spanish-only child to being an outgoing individual who spoke English effortlessly, all thanks to the help of a dedicated Jumpstart Corps member. This is a change that you help ignite by doing what you do!

Taylor Robinson
Los Angeles, California

When Angel first joined my reading group he was shy and often unresponsive. I soon realized that most of his vocabulary consisted of Spanish words, and his sentences were a jumble of English and Spanish. Over time, he began to open up more and more in conversations and his English vocabulary has been growing rapidly. He is now very active in reading discussions, can recognize most of the letters in his name, and can also recognize letters in other students' names... we have helped Angel to become more outgoing and interactive in the classroom as well as bolster his reading comprehension and alphabet knowledge.

Mary Lin
Los Angeles, California

I work with children of families who were homeless and are getting a second chance at rebuilding their lives. Without having a suitable preschool for their children to attend many of these families would not have the time to go out and find jobs and opportunities. While preschool is often seen as glorified day-care it is so much more. Not only are we giving these families the time to rebuild their lives we are also building their children's love of learning, creativity and self-confidence so that hopefully they will never fall behind in school and will never end up on the streets like their families did.

Becca Dehnel
Los Angeles, California

My name is Katisha Jasper, and I have been a lead teacher for eight years at a preschool located in Los Angeles, California. The benefits of high quality early learning for children are vast. When I think of high quality early learning, I think of program staff holding themselves to a high standard by seeking out knowledge of child development, and applying the skills they have learned with the children. I continuously attend workshops and classes so that I can stay on top of current best practices. When I do this, I have a positive impact on the children in my classroom. I see children that can relate well with teachers and peers. I see children that have the skills to resolve conflict with little adult intervention. Moreover, I see a child come up to me and say, "I want to see what happens when I mix baking soda, sugar, and water together." High quality early learning promotes creativity and curiosity in young children.

I believe the purpose of quality education is to share knowledge, so that children can acquire skills that will help them become productive members of society. For example, when you teach children to be critical thinkers, they will grow up to be the adults that become scientists and inventors...innovative people that add to society and not take away.

As a teacher, I want to unlock a child's full potential socially, emotionally, and cognitively; the journey begins with a program that believes in high quality care.

Katisha Jasper
Los Angeles, California

The teaching experience is professional, on-going, social, emotional, and intelligent active interactions between me and my co-workers and four to five years' old children in our High quality LAUP program. Teaching is about an intentional plan and action that is built daily based on the children's interest(s).

I feel alive, motivated, ready for action, and use innovative techniques to meet children's cognitive, social, emotional, language, health, safety awareness,

self-help, nutrition, and physical needs of each child (including child with special needs) in the total full inclusion LAUP program. I love the fact that teachers, children, and their parents are true learning partners and stakeholders in our high quality LAUP program. Usually, children and their families start the LAUP program with some expectations that are formed by personal experiences, media or their friends and families experiences. My job as an educator is to guide these expectations towards promoting independent problem solving, improving children's language, social/emotional, cognitive, safety, health, physical, and creative skills throughout the program year. I usually guide the children by asking them developmentally open-ended age appropriate questions based on the "Bloom Taxonomy". I love the fact that in this high quality model, children, their families, and educators (including me) are the equal learning partners and we learn from each other continuously and equally.

In addition, literally the sky is the learning limit for all of our low-income four to five years old in the LAUP program. The best part of teaching to me is the time when children start connecting learned information and coming up with their own conclusions, questions and assumptions. Then, I feel that, these young thinkers are going to be the future scientists, physicians, mathematicians, philanthropist, artists, peace makers, and politicians who are going to make more meaningful changes in the history of the man kinds. In sum, I see myself as an specialist who implements the NAEYC, Creative Curriculum, CLASS, and ECERS, and Title 22 requirements daily to provide a positive learning environment for these young children. So that they can function more independently, evaluate and analyze what they hear, see, listen and learn with my support as their technical support person in the school.

Susan Talebian
Los Angeles, California

I am a strong believer in the fact that getting an early start in education is the KEY to future success in our younger children. Whether in public, private, or funded programs, it's the first teacher (the parent) who decides the path for their child. Choosing to give a child an early start in learning is a gift of a lifetime. I have been an educator for several decades and it still amazes me to observe and listen to a young child interact with peers in their sweet little voices. To watch them as they explore the feeling of a ball of play dough, playing dress-up and playing mommy, to building with large wooden blocks and make believe it's a pirate ship or space shuttle launch pad, Their creativity is endless and fresh as times change and their little minds create/pretend a situation and decide how to deal and take care of it. Watching a child pretend a small wooden block is a cell phone and calling mom or dad and talking about how they are doing in school and asking to have a play date. If you're one who says "How much can you really teach a child, there are limits, they're too young" or the most annoying comment I've heard several times: "It's not rocket science." Well think again. These little children teach us, through their eyes!!

Giving a child an early start is opening their minds to social interaction, literacy, vocabulary expressing through music and physical movement for development in gross motor skills, painting, drawing and exploring the arts is awesome to see and hear a child's interpretation of an object and encourages story telling of their works of art. Early high quality learning is alive and it's happening now! I am proud to be an educator in a young child's life and the positive impact that it has made throughout the years I've been teaching is truly my inspiration that keeps me going and learning... When a former student visits me who is a graduate of USC, UCLA,... and tells me I'm a principal, I'm a teacher, I'm a doctor... WOW! They were once in my past as a child and now they are the present and the future in their life career of success and accomplishment!

Linda M. Giddens
Los Angeles, California

I been working with two years old for the past 25 years and it is the most important thing that one can do when working with children is to offer them the best education to which they are entitled. To be able to do this teacher must be prepared to do exactly that. The Aspire program has helped me to keep up my school education. All children regardless of social economic background have the right to be in a school setting where teacher provides them with plenty of opportunities through the day that are meaningful to them, but also opportunities where they can develop their whole self, social, emotional, cognitive, and physical skills. All children are smart; all children are able to learn and succeed in life if we the teachers are able to provide them with a fine education that they deserve. If we have support from our government to encourage more people to be excellent early childhood educators we will be in the right track. Just let me tell you just a little bit about me. When I started to work with the two year olds in a community center where I still work, I started my education in child development and one of my first assignments at college was to observe a private school and let me tell you I saw a big difference between the centers then I thought I can be providing the same positive interactions. I have the materials, and the setting was good, so I thought to myself why not provide and offer the same or better that was offered in a private school and I keep doing exactly that up to this day!

Nydia Rivero
Los Angeles, California

I believe in early child education, I believe in it because it's very important for the children to have a place to develop their thinking abilities. A place where the child can socialize with a peer. The first 5 years is a fundamental base of a child's life. A place where the child grows into developing and improving his academic, physical, and verbal skills. Early child education is a big opportunity where the children acquire their first pieces of knowledge. As a teacher, I think that

the younger children deserve the opportunity to have a quality education with qualified teachers that have a passion for teaching, and also have lots of patience and respect for the children.

Leticia Larios
Los Angeles, California

As an early childhood educator working in the field for 33 years, I have been able to see the many "fruits of our labor" as students have come, gone, and returned to our child care center. We get many different social and economic backgrounds, however, given the right tools and motivation we are able to form well-educated and productive people who are the future generation. It is a joint effort with the parents and/or guardians of the children we nurture and educate. At times, we may be educating the parents, who are the initial teachers, as well. It is important that we work together as a unit with the families, working hand-in-hand to accomplish the final goal of developing not only the whole child, but the whole person that they are going to be.

As early as infancy, we can see the developmental changes in a child who is in our infancy program. It is important to first instill in the child that they are in a safe, loving, and nurturing environment, making the child feel secure. Once we have gained their confidence, no matter the age, we are able to move forward to stimulating and offering them new and challenging experiences. It is equally important to develop their readiness skills thorough experiences such as dramatic and sensory play, small and large motor skill development, etc. Through play the children learn to make decisions, problem-solve, practice and develop new skills. Their learning capabilities are a never-ending adventure.

Ultimately, I believe by incorporating literacy at an early age we open the door to high quality learning. Besides promoting basic reading, our specific program utilizes picture stories, flannel stories, stories that tell

a narrative through song. We also introduce, at an early age, “sight words” as part of our daily circle time to build on their literacy. This is one of the areas we have seen the “fruits of our labor” as the children in our Kindergarten program are reading at their graduation ceremony. We are also rewarded when we have former students who are college graduates and are now lawyers, doctors, teachers, etc. and they have returned to our school to thank us for the foundational skills they obtained at our school. They have experienced first-hand the value of a high quality early learning program and they now want the same for their children or grandchildren. This is high-quality learning in action. This is what I see.

Catherine Catano
Los Angeles, California

I was a Head Start teacher for 8 years and later became a kindergarten teacher. Through the years of my teaching, I noticed a big change in kindergarten. It was no longer a place to explore the wonders of learning with a variety of hands on options, or to build social skills through play. Head Start and preschool gave them a good beginning in education. I found my students in kindergarten were better equipped socially and emotionally. Also, they were better prepared academically to be more successful in all categories in kindergarten and beyond.

Betty Dryden
California

I have a B.S. in Child Development, a Multiple Subjects Teaching Credential, an MA in Admin, and a supplemental PE Cred. I have been advocate of preschool for 31 years...having worked my way through college working in preschools and then later taught kindergarten for 5 years. My own 3 children attended preschool! My son who was born in November had a pre-K year as well as a kindergarten year. He went through school as a class leader with excellent grades and has now graduated from high school and is starting college. My 2 daughters have attended college and are now successful in their fields. I have always been a proponent of preschool... I now teach Physical Education (grades “K” through 4th) and it is so evident when children receive that extra nurturing in preschool during the first year of school with my Kinder classes!! I wish parents and politicians could come and observe more often!

Becky McCarty
California

My experience as an early interventionist with toddlers has been a very rewarding and opening experience. Especially having worked with autistic children and how rewarding it is to see the improvement with working with these children; especially working with communication and speech, and watching how the whole family grows and learns from early intervention. More needs to be done in this field.

Janine Duran
Irwindale, California

**Choosing to give a child an early start
in learning is a gift of a lifetime.**

Colorado

I worked as an Instructional Aid in pre-schools and then in classes with children who had autism or were from a home that did not encourage learning. These children did not get motivation for learning until they came to school. I believe Early Childhood Education would go a long way in keeping kids in school. Teachers can give children a lot more than book learning.

Susan Granias
Pagosa Springs, CO

We were lucky enough to have access to Dept. of Commerce's child care center in Boulder, Colorado. My husband is a federal employee. When we heard stories about the quality, programming, curriculum, and cost of other daycares, we were grateful for the excellence of the center our children attended. Please consider finding a way for all parents to have access to high-quality, affordable daycare! It makes a world of difference to working parents and their children alike.

Naomi Heiser
Louisville, Colorado

I am a single mother of three children ages 9, 7, and 2. At one point in time I was a full time student, and I used the child care subsidy to put my two older children in daycare, and preschool. I would not have been able to finish school without child care. I graduated and got a full time job, but I didn't have anyone to watch my children. Again I used the child care assistance for my children while I was at work during the day. This is a good program for people who do not have an economic advantage. Having put my children in daycare was the best thing I could have done for them and myself. They learn so much that they wouldn't if they were not in preschool, or child care. We cannot give up on our children. We have to put them first because they are our future. Child care alone is a whole pay check if there is no subsidy to

help out. People would not be able to survive and give their families the necessities of life. I am a person who wants to better myself, and sometimes I need a little help. You will have a lot more people losing jobs, and homes if you take away this subsidy. There is a lower working class of people that always seems to get left out, when it comes to budget cuts. Having an education is number one in my book, and my children should have the same opportunities as someone who is in the rich upper class. I am working on getting to the point where I don't need any help, but it is a process, and takes time.

Jernice Johnson
Denver, Colorado

I am a retired elementary school teacher. I taught for 42 years. I have my Ph.D. in education. I am a father of three grown daughters. Early childhood education and care are the best, most effective investments in democracy that we can make.

John Lamb
Lafayette, Colorado

My son will be graduating from high school this year. He is a member of National Honor Society and, last year, received a commendation from National Merit Scholars. I credit the excellent early childhood education he received while his dad and I were working for much of his later success in school. He had fun learning from an early age and never lost his enthusiasm for acquiring new knowledge. The foundation was set when he was an infant. He attended a daycare that offered love, security and age appropriate intellectual stimulation. He has not had an easy time due to his dysgraphia and ADHD, but his desire to learn has stayed with him and has helped him stay determined to do the work he had to do to make good grades. I firmly believe that all children should have access to strong early childhood education. It provides a more level playing field as they

**Early childhood education and care are
the best, most effective investments in
democracy that we can make.**

enter school and gives them the opportunity to succeed in spite of adversity. I believe that it is the ticket out of a life of government supplemented existence. I hope Congress will see the wisdom of providing a strong foundation to our youngest citizens, so that they one day they will be contributors to our country rather than dependents.

Sally Neel
Pagosa Springs, Colorado

One of my grandchildren couldn't get into a preschool. His mother was excited that he could still be learning and doing different activities and she could be connected with other parents who are also in the HIPPY Program. Matty was so excited to get his school supplies and "homework" packets. He especially enjoys all the activities that require cutting and pasting. His Mom told me he enjoys the books too. Matty can now write his name, identify his shapes and colors. They have really enjoyed the monthly group meetings as a family too.

Grandparent
Denver, Colorado

In 2002 I did the HIPPY program with my daughter as well as I started as a Home Visitor. After two year I got the opportunity to be the group leader of the Family Literacy Preschool. In 2007 I became the Program Assistant Coordinator. During all these years I continued with my education using my AmeriCorps award and I proudly can say that last May 2012 I got my Associate Degree in ECE and hope soon I will obtain my BA in Early Education. HIPPY, Jeffco and AmeriCorps has been a great opportunity bridge for me and my family.

Parent
Denver, Colorado

Julio entered the Early Head Start program at 6 weeks of age. He was not able to pass his 45-day screening for his ears. Our nurse practitioner worked with this family in referring them to their pediatrician who confirmed a hearing loss. Julio was next referred to Children's Hospital where they did surgery and inserted tubes. Julio is still showing some hearing loss, but as we move forward to watch his development he will be able to catch up with his peers. Because of a supportive family and the help of the EHS team, he has a better opportunity to realize his potential and receive any further help he might need for his hearing.

Peggy Baker
Alamosa, Colorado

Connecticut

All Our Kin, Inc., is a nationally-recognized, Connecticut-based nonprofit organization that trains, supports, and sustains community child care providers in order to ensure that children and families have the foundation they need to succeed in school and in life. The story below is by one of the family child care providers in our network, Josie Queen.

This year's All Our Kin conference is entitled "Caterpillar to Butterfly," a very relevant metaphor for the world of child care; a world that is constantly evolving. There are four stages to a butterfly's life: The egg stage, the larvae (or caterpillar) stage, the chrysalis stage and then the adult butterfly. It's a pretty amazing transformation: nature at its most flamboyant. The life cycle of a butterfly can be applied to many things in life. Our own life cycle, while not quite as ostentatious (in most circumstances), follows the same path: embryo, baby (just like caterpillars they eat and eat and eat), teenager (they don't build an actual chrysalis, but they do spend a good deal of time hibernating in their rooms) and adult. But for this article I wanted to compare the life cycle of the butterfly to my own transformation, with the help of All Our Kin, from someone who wanted to run a daycare in order to stay home with her newborn daughter to a full-fledged business owner with the tools and education to provide the children in her care with a good foundation for their own education.

The Egg Stage: The egg was hatched right before my daughter was born. I found out that maternity leave in the US is nowhere near as long as the full year offered to new mothers in the UK, so I decided that I needed to find a way to stay home with her and still make a living. Home daycare was the logical choice as I had a lot of experience with childcare. During my research on how to become a daycare owner in New Haven I came across All Our Kin and visited Nilda Aponte one sunny afternoon a couple of weeks before my due date. I was a little apprehensive and unsure of attempting to start a business by myself. I was amazed at the resources offered by All Our Kin and suddenly the thought of owning a daycare was not quite so intimidating. I

realized, while talking to Nilda, that this was something I would not have to tackle alone.

The Larvae (or caterpillar) Stage: Caterpillars eat and eat during this stage. Ever read "The Very Hungry Caterpillar" by Eric Carle? It's a wonderful book and a favorite among the children I care for. But as much as I love food I have to use the eating and growing as more of a metaphor here. I ingested as much information and education that All Our Kin offered as I could. Their Tool Box Project is awesome. I came home from the All Our Kin offices one day with boxes filled with just about everything I needed to start the process of opening a family day care home. There were flyers and brochures, application forms, the Department of Public Health's rules and regulations, there was equipment to help set up the environment: a fire extinguisher, smoke alarms, socket covers, water thermometers. All Our Kin even provided CPR and first aid education along with medical administration training. Then, a final box and workshop with toys, books and supplies covering the multiple intelligences proposed by Howard Gardner: spatial, logical-mathematical, linguistic, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal and naturalistic. The workshop itself, held at The Children's Museum in New Haven and funded by Sandra Malmquist and the New Haven Early Childhood Council, was exciting and powerful, filling me with inspiration. And this was just the start of all the education I would be getting, free of charge, from All Our Kin. I couldn't get enough, I felt that I needed to gorge on everything available, to fill my mind with as much as possible. I was an absolute glutton and loved every morsel. Then I went into a kind of hibernation.

The Chrysalis Stage: Okay, so it was an unintended hibernation. It took me a full year to get any children enrolled in my daycare. I wasn't idle during that time; I was using the information I had devoured in a nanny job I had been lucky enough to get that allowed me to be with my daughter every day. (Ironically, the little boy I cared for went on to attend Creating Kids, the daycare/preschool run by Sandra Malmquist at The Children's Museum.) I ruminated on everything I

was learning. I opened the daycare with two toddlers enrolled and, of course, my own little girl. Once I had children enrolled I qualified for the All Our Kin mentor program. Tyree Dickey came to visit and everything started fitting right into place. She offered priceless advice and modeled activities for the children. I was lucky enough to receive a free raised garden as part of All Our Kin's Gardening Project and Shel Swanson came several times to plant the veggies, educate me on the garden and excite the children enough to get them motivated to try everything they grew even radishes and Brussel sprouts! I received valuable business training from Julia Granata and even more teacher mentoring from educational consultant Quinn Hunter McGonagle.

The Butterfly Stage: It goes without saying that all this education, information, mentoring and encouragement allowed me to spread my wings and soar. It's allowed me to engage the children in a variety of ways that I may not have thought of before. We create activities and crafts to go along with the books that we read every day. We base our learning around themes such as fish and ocean life, bugs and insects, even themes as simple as colors. All Our Kin has provided me with a priceless resource of information that I can use at any time to educate the children in my care. The butterfly stage in this example is not the end of the transformation. With All Our Kin's continuing education; monthly meetings, workshops, classes and their yearly conference coming up, I feel that I can keep growing, keep transforming, and keep soaring.

Josie Queen
New Haven, Connecticut

My experience working with children is that are viewed as thinker, reflecting about their world. Play is a way of learning for children. I believe that parents should see how a classroom is managed busy, noisy, happy, and creative.

Kathleen Snow
Hartford, Connecticut

It goes without saying that all this education, information, mentoring and encouragement allowed me to spread my wings and soar.

Pre-school education is extremely important, especially for English Language Learners. My sister works for a Head Start program and her students who come in to the system speaking their native language are immersed in English and quickly learn to first speak then read in English. This has proven to be effective when they enter public school and are familiar with the language. My niece and nephews have all attended pre-school and when they entered public school they were more than ready to meet the challenges in learning and socializing. Pre-school matters. All children should attend.

Celeste Smith
Bridgeport, Connecticut

My grandson attended a pre-k program and it made a world of difference in his preparedness for kindergarten both educationally and social emotionally. Please continue to support the early learning initiative; it is really a bridge to the productive future of many children.

Marisol Castro
New Britain, Connecticut

My daughter had JRA as a toddler. We were blessed to have a preschool where the teacher implemented her PT exercises into the day to keep her joints active. She did this without drawing attention to her disability. My daughter never knew that she had a disability.

Vesna Violette
Southington, Connecticut

Delaware

In my first year as program coordinator/family service worker of a state-funded early childhood program I enrolled a young mother receiving AFDC (now TANF) with a four-year-old child. She was nearing the end of her two-year cut-off for funding with no plan for future employment. At the enrollment meeting I asked her what she did or does that makes her heart smile and she replied “spending time with [my son] and watching him learn.” Later in the year, when we sat down to work on goals for this mother, we discussed our earlier conversation of her enjoying watching her son learn. Her community was in need of quality child care and when I suggested starting her own family child care, she was interested but not optimistic that she could take on such a job. Two years later, her family child care received a Governor’s Award for Excellence in Early Childhood,” the same year our program received a Governor’s Award. She received a first-place award and we received a second-place award and I couldn’t have been happier! Today, this mother has a large child care center in the same community and is serving hundreds of children living in low-income homes. Her son was an honorable student in our school district and is now attending college. I have hundreds of success stories like this and know from 25+ years of serving families and young children at risk that the money invested early is wisely spent.

Nancy Smith
Delaware

Today, this mother has a large child care center in the same community and is serving hundreds of children living in low-income homes.



District of Columbia

An early education really matters for all children. As a visiting instructor, I see children benefit from early instruction in so many ways, especially through reading books.

Gwendolyn Evans-Orange
Washington, DC

One of my students with a disability made a connection with a book which enabled him to share it and make a connection with his classmates. It is why early childhood classes are necessary and important.

Cheryl Miller
Washington, DC

I have four children. My two oldest started school at the same time at the ages of 3 and 4. While they were in different grades (preschool and pre-k), by the time they got to 1st and 2nd grade, both were reading at essentially the same level. My third child began school at 3, and at that age, they are capable of retaining a wealth of information. If we want to give our kids an edge, we should not be waiting until 4 and 5 to send them to school. The adjustment for my younger kids was 10 times easier. I have been lucky in finding a public school with an excellent preschool program. But there is no way I could have afforded to pay for that at the time. If we start our kids out strong, everything else becomes easy. Once you have the foundation for reading and math, our children will have that for the rest of their lives.

Nefeteria Francis
Washington, DC

My daughters are all grown up now, but they were nurtured in early childhood learning centers and I am sure if I had not been able to leave them in these facilities they would not be the fine young women they are now. One has opened her own business in the US

Virgin Islands and the other is a CPA and Comptroller at a large company here in the District of Columbia. I too was a divorced mom and these facilities were great for me because I could go to work and provide the necessities of life for the three of us.

Francine Watson
Washington, DC

During my first month of working with Jumpstart in my freshman year, I fell in love with my partner child. Daniel was one of the more active children in his classroom, and despite being unable to sit still or listen to direction, he was always engaged in activities. As the months progressed, Daniel excelled in Reading and Center Time, though I was worried as he seemed to show a limited amount of improvement in writing his name and sounding out letters. In April, towards the end of the Jumpstart year, that changed. One morning while we were going over letters, Daniel proclaimed "We almost have the same name!" On the top of the paper he wrote out his name, and below it, he wrote mine. I was in shock that he recognized the similarities between Daniel and Daniela, much less knew all of the letters in both of our names. That moment truly solidified all I had been working hard to achieve in early education, and I wouldn't trade it for the world.

Daniela DiGuido
Washington, DC

Children growing up in the District of Columbia have an opportunity offered by very few other cities in the country, universal Pre-Kindergarten programs provided by the DC Public School system. And what is incredible is the quality and variety of programming available. Through the lottery, families have the choice to apply for Montessori, Arts Integration, Dual Language, Reggio Emilia, or Tools of the Mind programming. Children in my class have experienced different cultures, abilities, and understandings through their classmates and the rich exploration opportunities this city has available 3- and 4-year-olds! My children and

their families grow together on their way to a more successful and enjoyable compulsory schooling experience. Because of Pre-Kindergarten in the District of Columbia Public Schools more students go to Kindergarten knowing letters, numbers, and sounds and with an enthusiasm for learning than ever before!

Kristen Luppino
Washington, DC

As a preschool teacher in the DC Public Schools, I can vouch first hand for the importance of early childhood education in my students' lives. High quality early childhood experiences offer young children exposure not only to early academic skills, such as letters, numbers, shapes and counting, but also the social skills necessary to thrive in a classroom community. The 17 3- and 4-year-old children in my class form a tight-knit community, where they need to advocate for their own wants and needs, compromise with others, share, take turns, and take care of each other, all critical skills for thriving in a democratic society. As an early

childhood teacher, I have the opportunity to teach basic social skills every person needs to learn, like how to express feelings or mediate a disagreement, in an environment where children are constantly practicing these skills, playing along with others. High quality early childhood experiences also support children in every aspect of their development, from literacy and mathematics development to physical or language development. The foundation this builds for further success in school, and life in general, is paramount to the success of my past and current students, and I believe, future generations of children.

Krystal Beaulieu
Washington, DC

Florida

I have been a Head Start teacher for over 6 years. Although I believe in quality education with quality teachers, the low pay causes many good teachers to go elsewhere. A single person in my community could not live on a Head Start teacher's salary without help from the government or family. I am blessed to be married and that helps more than you know. With the government cutting funding for our most vulnerable students and teachers they are leaving because they can't survive on a Head Start salary, even if they have a B.S. degree. How can we give a high quality education?

Janet Eades
Florida

I am a retired professional counselor. For my whole career I witnessed the positive changes in early education. Outcomes in adulthood demonstrated consistently and clearly the tremendous benefit to children with special needs. My first exposure to early learning outcomes began with kindergarten, which I did not have available to me. Later, my child and adult clients who were deaf and hearing impaired were identified and funneled into early speech and language programs by age three. The impact was tremendous in the advantage these kids had when they were competing in the work force as adults. Whilst working with people with developmental challenges I saw incredible differences in my clients who were afforded early intervention and education compared to those who were older and had none. My sister is a teacher of gifted children and is also an advocate of early identification and specialized early education for them, as well because they require targeted programs to meet their specific needs. Our economy grows and becomes stronger when we have a skilled and well educated work force. I thank you with all my heart for your full and strong support of early education for ALL our children!

Kathy Lynn Johnson
Ft Myers, Florida

When my daughter was very young she attended pre-school at a child care center at Auburn Univ. The program was located in a quality building that was part of the New Deal WPA program. The staff there included Auburn education majors and the programming was very creative. The experience enhanced her early childhood development. She recently graduated college and has joined the Teach for America staff.

Kathleen Walston Pagan
Gainesville, Florida

I'm a teacher who has worked with low performing students at all levels, and often these kids get into trouble and fight and turn to crime because they can't make it in school. I'm also a mother who has seen the difference in kids who were taught at home before they started school and those who were not. I couldn't really afford to but I stayed home with my girls and from birth I spent time with them every day, talking and reading with them, and teaching them to be kind and caring. Now they are successful students in advanced academics and honors classes. They are also kind and well-liked by peers and teachers alike. Children shouldn't have to wait to learn socialization and academic skills until they start school at 4 or 5 years of age. The first five years are critical. We need to intervene in the lives of at risk kids even before they are born. We need to teach parenting skills to at risk parents and make sure that during pregnancy babies are nourished and not damaged by drugs or alcohol in the womb. That alone can cause learning disabilities that could limit them forever. We also need to start teaching these babies at birth so they can have a decent start in life and a reasonable chance to become a contributing member of our society. The money we spend educating and caring for at risk teen moms and at risk babies will keep us from having to spend a lot more later for prisons, police officers, public assistance, and for all the extra nurses and aides, special equipment and buses that will be required if babies harmed in the womb are born with challenges and need special education. I think our local schools, chil-

dren's hospitals, politicians, and pediatricians should work together to identify at risk mothers and babies and work to create environments and develop programs where they can be helped and taught in order to have an improved quality of life. This will make our cities and towns safer and happier for all residents.

Kim Diaz
St Petersburg, Florida

My daughter just completed Pre-K. I am very proud to say that she had a great experience. Her teacher and classmates allowed her to go from a child who hardly ever spoke to a child who was the lead singer at their end of the year graduation.

Shafeza Moonab
Coral Springs, Florida

I have witnessed the overwhelming intellectual abilities and continued success of an extended family member. The ability of this young girl to achieve gains beyond her years is attributed to her head start in early childhood education. Therefore, it is imperative that this opportunity be made possible for as many families as possible.

Miriam Wedderburn
Miami, Florida

As Kindergarten teacher, we get students with all levels of preparation. Many of our students come from low SES backgrounds and lack experiences which affect background knowledge and exposure to vocabulary and reading experiences. Since we have had the VPK (voluntary pre-kindergarten) program in school, so many more of our students come in better prepared to meet the rigor of Kindergarten. It becomes painfully obvious right away those that have had this experience and those that have not. It has become obvious that those who do not have that VPK experience struggle more and often lag behind those that

do. Unfortunately, some never catch up for lack of a strong start in those very early teachable moments.

Karen Lassiter
Lake Helen, Florida

I couldn't have done it without Head Start. As a single mother of twins on welfare, I was able to continue going to school to become a teacher while my own children got a quality education in the Head Start program. The program helped bring my family out of poverty. Today, both my children are in the 7th grade gifted program at their school and I am an elementary Special Education Teacher.

Iggy Monsalve
Miami, Florida

My child has autism and has truly benefited from having Early Head Start and home visit services. These services offered him the early remediation necessary to enter kindergarten at the appropriate time. My son continues to be able to attend a typical elementary school, as a part of a cluster program. I attribute the services he received from age 3-5 to his current success as a student.

Kalebra, Jacobs-Reed
Miramar, Florida

I have personally experienced many children that have benefited from early learning programs such as early screening and detection of learning disabilities. The earlier we can find them and work with the children on intervention, the less dollars it will cost later on, in medical, and social impact such as delinquency and prison inmate care. Most of these children can overcome their disability by the age of 8 if detected, diagnosed and treated early on.

Mabel Ramirez
Miami Lake, Florida

Georgia

I am the mother of two daughters ages 35 and 21. My oldest daughter attended private schools in the early learning stages of her life because I was a single parent and had to work full time. She is currently a medical dialysis technician. I was married when I gave birth to my youngest daughter which was 14 years later. As soon as I learned I was expecting, I began to read to her in the womb. When she was born (her favorite books were Dr. Seuss), I would repeatedly read some of the very same books to her and she showed early signs of cognition by laughing before I could get to the punch lines. I was so thrilled that I made reading and other early learning activities a part of our daily routine. By the time she entered Kindergarten, she was reading not only to her class but also to students in first grade. She had also been taught her alphabets and learned to write. Early learning has not only resulted in Wallisya's ability to excel in school at an early age, it also enhanced her learning abilities with the gift of writing and cognitive processes. Five years after Wallisya entered Kindergarten, I decided to become a teacher. I can honestly testify that providing children with an early start is the greatest strategy for providing them an opportunity to excel in life because of the confidence they acquire knowing that have the ability to learn and be successful at it!

Nanda A. Davis-Johnson
Dunwoody, Georgia

Carolann had moved to Athens and was nervous about being pregnant without a support system and having a demanding fast food job. She signed up for Healthy Families to build her parenting skills. She had not had much experience with newborns or young children. She and her Family Support Worker "clicked" and she gained confidence as a parent. She was also able to share ideas for employment changes with her FSW. Today her child is a successful student and she is a store manager who regularly gives back to Healthy Families through toy and food drives.

Mary Hood
Athens, Georgia

Childcare for the dual working family is crucial. Times are tough and families of all income levels need access to the best early learning childcare experience for their children. I am hoping that legislators will find a way to relate to every day families enough to continue government programs that provide parents with access to quality early learning childcare. As a mother of three, all of whom have enjoyed the educational benefits of private pre-kindergarten and kindergarten, I have not had the need for government assistance. BUT as the new owner of my own childcare early learning center, I see daily the need for wonderful families of lower income levels to have access to assistance in order to give their children the same or similar opportunities as children of more affluent families. By providing the financial resources to early childhood education for all income levels, our country will continue its trend of being a leader among all nations. Without access to early childhood education for all families, we are on our way to becoming a third world country! We must invest in our future, starting with the children!

Shana Finks
Duluth Georgia

On the first day of Pre-Kindergarten, my four year started to cry as soon as he walked through the doors of Sheltering Arms (Model Teaching Center). However the staff there were the first to take his hand and make sure that he would be ok. They reassured my husband and I and told us to call or even wait to make sure that he would be ok. I truly appreciate every extra effort that was taken. I also understand the importance of laying a strong foundation for our youth today. If we as a community don't show our youth the importance of community and taking care of others, who will? Cutting the Pre-K program in Georgia by 54% is definitely not laying a strong foundation of a caring community for our youth or the families that depend on affordable Pre-K. As a mother, wife, daughter, program coordinator, I strongly urge that we as community invest in our future by not cutting funding for the Pre-K program.

Cicely Richard
Stone Mountain, Georgia

Hawaii

The Montessori Country School is a wonderful Montessori-based Preschool and Kindergarten. As I received a partial state subsidy to pay his tuition, this allowed me to go back to work part-time. In the meantime, Sean received an excellent preparation for elementary school. This May, my son will be graduating from high school. He is a nationally recognized classical musician who has performed at the annual fundraiser for his preschool alma mater. He has also provided Arts Leadership to fourth grade students in his community. Sean is not the only success story for affordable, high-quality Preschool. Early Learning is an essential investment in our children which pays immeasurable dividends, as they are our future.

Vicky Robbins
Pahoa, Hawaii



Idaho

Being able to go to work, and work my way up from a minimum-wage receptionist position to a licensed insurance agent, has only been possible with help with daycare!

I am the single mother of four; yes, FOUR children. Without my daycare subsidy from the Idaho Child Care Program, I would not be able to afford to work. Granted, at this point in time I now only have two children who still need daycare, but if I had to pay the full amount, it would take an entire paycheck to enable me to work outside the home. Being able to go to work, and work my way up from a minimum-wage receptionist position to a licensed insurance agent, has only been possible with help with daycare!

Kori Jones
Burley, Idaho

I want to share with you how much it has meant to me as a provider to receive funding for the children in my care. I use this funding to enhance my daycare, to replace things and to create a wonderful learning environment. Without it I wouldn't have been able to get the supplies and furniture I desperately needed.

I also am part of the Idaho Stars program in our state. They are the ones who have helped the children in my care. They are also helping me better my education in Early Child Development, something I am very passionate about. By cutting funds and getting rid of services, you are taking away from the children who need it and look up to us to provide these things. I love working with children and I would have been doing it even without the help but the help has made it easier.

I work with children as young as 4 weeks and as old as 5. These children look up to me as a nurturer, teacher, family figure, and friend. I love each and every one of them but I don't make a huge amount of money caring for these kids. So again, this is why it is so important to childcare providers and teachers to keep the funding and services available. All of the trainings, scholarships, grants, all of these are a major part of these children being taught right and cared for right.

I want to be the best at my job!

Keri Jaskey
Idaho

My grandson's pre-K class held a little ceremony every day to learn why we honor our country. They listened to songs, said the pledge of allegiance, and asked questions. I asked my grandson what he had learned. He sang, "I'm proud to be an American where at least I know I'm free!" "Do you know what that means?" I asked. He looked me straight in the eye and replied, "I get to choose and no one can tell me what to do as long as I'm good! That's what makes America great!" He also made friends and learned a lot about his letters and numbers in pre-K, but I'm very glad that he learned to love our country while he was there. He still talks about his teachers and experience there, I think it set him up to do very well in Kindergarten.

Richard Holland
Moscow, Idaho

Illinois

Working as a bilingual case manager with pregnant and parenting teens, I had the privilege of witnessing firsthand the benefits of early Head Start with the families I worked with. I had a teen parent that was against child care, due to her own history of trauma as part of her involvement with child welfare. While I had concerns of slight developmental delays the teen parent was adamant there was nothing wrong with her son. Finally at the age of two she decided her son was ready for Early Head Start. Within a month of being involved in the program you could see the change in his behaviors. With him being more expressive, initiating conversation with his mom, using his imagination with toys, using more words, and telling his mom what happened in school that day. Even her sibling and family members remarked at how much his speech and interactions with other young children improved.

Christine Nicpon
Chicago, Illinois

I am an assistant head start teacher. Until I worked in a head start classroom, I had no idea how much goes into this program for at risk children. Our center is 85% Hispanic. Many of the children and parents do not speak English. Children are not separated into age groups, but spend the time with one teacher, and the same children. There are family involvement specialists who make sure the children get the medical, dental and other care that they need-including psychological evaluation, and early speech intervention. Without this program these children would be lost in a regular school setting. There is nothing like watching these children blossom and realize their potential-children in a silent period which is typical on English language learners-suddenly chattering away in English, or a child who screams, cries and hides the first day of school making friends and learning how to go down the slide. This program respects the culture and involves the family while teaching them how to learn in their new environment.

Marianne Flanagan
Des Plaines, Illinois

When my children were 1 and 3 I took a new job at Dominican University. I was so fortunate that the university's School of Education runs a day-care program on site. My daughters could come with me to work, spend the day under the care and instruction of trained teachers and student-teachers, have a hot meal at lunch and an outdoor playground. Knowing they had a great place to go, and one that was really part of my work life made such a difference for my family.

Liesl Orenic
Oak Park, Illinois

I am a single mother of now two adult children. If it wasn't for funds that subsidized programs, my children would not have had child care that allowed me to work for \$5 an hour. This allowed me to not only feed and clothe my children. It allowed me to learn skills that eventually had me start my own business and give my girls the opportunity for college education. In fact one daughter has her Masters!! I can't even imagine what would have happened to us if we hadn't had help. One of my daughters manages my business and one daughter is a regional manager for 211, helping others. I cry when I remember those days. Don't know how we did it. These programs are necessary for the safety of our children as those of us that must work outside our homes.

Lucy Brundage
River Forest, Illinois

Our school district provides early childhood education facilities and programs, and is able to include our high school students interested in early education. The young students so look up to the teenagers, and the confidence boost this gives to the young adults, the very idea that they are valued, is amazing! Please continue to support early childhood education!

Kathryn Padberg
Lombard, Illinois



Our children (three boys) were blessed with Early Childhood experiences that helped them throughout their lives – they learned how to share with others, no hurts, and be kind. Simple messages that we all can support. We learn from those early messages and they make us better people.

Robin Rogers
Oak Park, IL

I was one of the lucky ones-I was the first granddaughter of the oldest son and lived in the same town as my grandparents. I cannot remember not being able to read and sloughed through my first “adult” book (The Trail of The Lonesome Pine) when I was four. I was also playing Canasta with my Grandmother and Great Grandmother at that age. By six I could use a slide rule and extract a cubed root, and understood what it was. I was in Third Grade by then. Although I did not have a formal early learning program, I had family devoted to me. A formal early learning program gives this advantage to children who are not as lucky as I was, and gives them an important head start.

Diane A. Megahy
Belleville, Illinois

As a special educator, I can tell the difference in the skill level of the students who were exposed to the Early Childhood Program verses the ones who were not. Students who were not exposed have a difficult time adjusting to structure, focusing and performing. When a student has not experienced the Early Childhood Program and is placed in a classroom with children who have had it, he tends to fall behind because the teacher has to keep a certain pace to expose the students to the requirements of the program. Those

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students who have not at some point end up so far behind that they eventually are tested and placed in the Special Education Program. It appears that too many students end up in special education than in years past.

Sharon Crockett
East St, Louis, Illinois

I am a product of an early learning program. 30+ years later I am now the Executive Program Director and owner of a childcare program. Through my own personal experience and the experiences of the children and families that I now serve I know the huge impact that early care programs have on being the foundation for creating productive citizens. Additionally, the positive economic impact is immeasurable and lifelong. Support for early learning is both needed and necessary for a better America!

Levell Baker
Illinois

The first day of kindergarten in my program is filled with excitement! All of our children are ready because they have been learning from the age of 6 weeks. With the passing of our President’s Early Learning Plan, this could be the way all children start their first of kindergarten- prepared and ready!

As a supporter of early childhood education and working families, I have witnessed firsthand the benefits of early childhood education. Just today, I was at a family

child care home and the provider shared observations she had about a new child in her daycare and his language development. I and another coworker helped the parent schedule a developmental screening with Early Intervention. Had this child not been in a high quality day care home, who knows when and if anyone would have noticed his speech issues?

Gladys Moran
Illinois

Early learning is important because it: Prepares children for the future. Helps parents as they become involved in the education of their child. Secures a better future for all of us. Early learning is important to me as a provider because it helps validate and support my passion of being a game changer in the life of children, families, and the community.

Faith Arnold
Illinois

As an employee of a Head Start Program, I have witnessed the positive effects that the program has on whole families. While Head Start does set high standards for quality for child development, it doesn't just stop there, staff works together with all members of the child's immediate family to set and achieve goals. My favorite part of my job is working with our Parent Policy Council. I help to run elections so that parents can serve in leadership positions and learn how to be advocates for themselves and their peers.

I love that my agency listens to them, and respects their opinions. I love when they ask smart questions about program changes or candidates for hire. I love it when they make suggestions for improving programming based on discussions with other parents. I know

that they will go to their respective elementary school and speak out for the rights of their children and themselves. I know they built up the confidence to do that while they were here in Head Start.

Colleen Douglass
Chicago, Illinois

My experience in early learning began with my own son, when he started attending a program at the age of three. At that time, he could speak only a few words. While enrolled in the special needs program, he received the tools he needed to succeed. My son is now in eighth grade and has been enrolled in all general education classes since last year. He is doing very well and has made the honor rolls every year since he was in third grade! This is just one of the reasons I myself chose to be an early childhood educator with a concentration in special education.

Trina Wooden
Riverdale, Illinois

My son is 3 and has just started his first week of preschool. In this short time, our family has already seen his excitement for and dedication to learning grows- a fact which I feel is crucial to a foundation for lifelong learning. A passion to learn at such an early age encourages me to believe that my child, Malcolm, will pursue higher education in the future and achieve success!

Kandice Hill
South Holland, Illinois

Since being in preschool, my daughter has flourished! Not only is she learning new things and getting a jump start in her education, but her social skills have grown by leaps and bound. Preschool has prepared her well for kindergarten next year. Early learning is essential to all children's education and that was certainly the case for my daughter!

Tiffany Ross
Harvey, Illinois

I am a parent of two. My oldest, Laila, is 3 and since she has entered preschool her social and emotional behavior has improved. I feel that she is off to a great start due to early learning. The skills she has developed are thanks to her teachers providing lessons on letters, counting, and craft making. I support the President's proposal for early learning because I know that this will prepare her for kindergarten, and keep her motivated for lifelong learning!

Lawanda Bennett
Harvey, Illinois

Indiana

I'm a full time working mother with two children in full time daycare, ages 1 and 4. Fortunately I have a wonderful education centered daycare facility in our town. However, affording it can be a struggle. I pay more per month in childcare expenses than I do for my mortgage. My husband was laid off from the Elevator Constructors union 16 months ago; he continues to work part time but we haven't dared pull our girls out of daycare for fear of being without quality care when he is called back to work due to waiting lists at our childcare facility. I don't complain about paying for quality child care, as I see the educational benefits already in my 4 year old. However, what I would like to see is the Dependent Care Spending account limits raised. The current annual contribution limit of \$5,000 per year doesn't begin to cover one child in full time quality daycare, let alone more than one child.

Kathleen Clark
Chesteron, Indiana

I have 3 children diagnosed with Autism. They all 3 share speech delay as well as sensory issues. We were fortunate to have First Steps Therapists in our homes and then on to an excellent Public Preschool. I stress the word FORTUNATE as we live in an outstanding school district. I would push for awareness and no more cutbacks for these children. My husband also works for Nucor Steel that allows unlimited private therapy as well as in home ABA. Autism needs answers. While we wait there are so many underprivileged children that are not getting the help they need. It is critical that these children are not left behind. Please vote always to help these children.

Laura Grenkowicz
Fort Wayne, Indiana

Cradles to Crayons, LLC has been providing high quality child care to the children of Danville, Indiana for 20 years. We are a NAEYC accredited program and have a Level 4 Paths to Quality rating from the State

of Indiana. The Program has maintained the original Management Team since the very beginning. Our journey to high quality began with a State Funded program called TEACH. Through TEACH our staff was able to complete the CDA program through Ivy Tech Community College. We became a satellite site and meet with a lot of other providers within our county.

That CDA class totally changed the way we thought about teaching preschool age children. It brought to us concepts like developmentally appropriate activities, meaningful play and relevance to the child's life. We took those concepts and incorporated them into our everyday lesson plans. We began to teach to each child's individual needs. We had parent teacher conferences and began including families in activities at the Center. We helped the families who needed support with everyday life and pointed them in the direction of State Agencies when they needed extra help. High quality child care should always include a family component. Our staff eventually developed our own curriculum that we work with. We always keep in mind that the children lead the lessons based on their interest and their development level. Children will only thrive if we set them up for success, not failure. There are many cases of success in a high quality program. We currently have a student who came from a program that had little quality and were unable to provide the kind of care this child needed. They were calling his mom everyday telling her about how uncontrollable he was and how he was unable to follow directions. Once he got to us, we began to assess him using our assessment tools and found that he needs clear instructions and consistency in his life. Now, he is successful at group situations and is learning rapidly. High quality care is a process. You don't one day decide that you are going to provide quality care and poof, the next day here it is. It takes experience, work and trust to make a program function at a high level.

Mary Jo Kern
Indiana

Iowa

I was asked to start a new classroom for our child care center. When I was given a list of the children's names', my jaw dropped and I was unsure how I was ever going to make it through the year. The children ranged from 2-1/2 to 3 years old and each of them had frequent reports of hitting, spitting, biting, vulgar language, etc. My co-workers often told me that they would never agree to be with those children. One of the children's moms, took me aside the day before the children moved to our new room. She told me that she knew how her son behaved, that the behavior had to change, and that she had no idea how I was ever going to get a classroom full of like children to behave. She gave me a hug, told me good luck and she hoped we would find a solution together before it was too late for her son. Research has shown that the behavior you see in a child at four is the same behavior you will see that at 16. "It will break my heart if we don't do something now," she stated. I agreed whole-heartedly.

I began by observing the children in play and watched how they interacted. I noted who, what, when, where of each conflict and wondered why it occurred. I read a book called, "Beyond Behavior Management: The Six Life Skills Children Need" by Jenna Bilmes and realized that the stories of "misbehavior" in Ms. Bilmes book were the same as I saw in my classroom. So, with the agreement of the parents, we went back to the basics and started from scratch. I offered the children a structured schedule that still allowed them to have choices during their day. The children were able to learn autonomy and interrelationship skills as they made decisions together on what activity they would engage in together. At the same time, they were taught that it was okay to play alone and their space wouldn't be impeded as they played. The children were encouraged to play at their level of play. Earlier, the children were expected to play peacefully in a large group; however these children were not ready for group play. They hadn't even learned how to play on their own. I taught the children words to use when they were mad, and how to solve conflicts without using "hurtful words" and "angry touches". I started introducing bonding activities to teach them I was someone they could trust and that they were safe at daycare.

Tactics were adjusted daily and the children were beginning to think about their actions, most of the time. The children only heard positive statements when the parent's arrived at the end of the day, concerns, questions about behavior and incidents, were shared through a notebook between the parents and me. The children began to laugh and want to come to day care. After three months of hard work and love, the child of the mom I wrote about earlier, was playing outside. An older child took a toy of his and he followed the child around asking for the toy. I looked at the boy and said, "I hear you using your words and you are correct. You had that toy first. Ask him one more time for the toy and if that doesn't work ask me for help." You could see the light bulb of understanding turn on. He smiled a big smile and was able to get the toy back with using his words. From that day on, that boy never hit, spit, or kicked during a disagreement...for the most part. The boy is going into second grade now. I still keep in touch with his mom. Every year on his birthday, I receive a "thank you" call. She shares stories of his life. He is a straight "A" student and is often praised as a leader by his teachers. He is outgoing and a defender of any child being teased. I thank his mom for the compliment, and then I remind her that he was successful because of the partnership we entered together. I thank her for her dedication to her son's future; she thanks me for mentoring her and not giving up on him. I can't wait to hear from her this year!

Kathy Richmond
Iowa

Below, please find just 1 of many success stories we have been witness to in serving families of Buena Vista County in Iowa. Both of these families happen to be served through our Early Head Start Program, via MIECHV funding. We serve families through Early Head Start (Home Base and Center Base) and Head Start. We feel very blessed to be a part of such wonderful programs and see first-hand to positive outcomes families are able to achieve.

Success Story: Three months ago, an Early Head Start staff member entered a small apartment to conduct an initial home visit for the EHS Home Base program. The TV was on, tuned in to the Cartoon Network. Mom answered the door with her phone in hand. The eight month old infant, just enrolled into the home based program, was sitting in a baby walker with wheels, staring at the TV. He did not look in the direction of the door or at the sound of a new voice in the room. He continued to stare at the TV. Upon formal introductions, the home visitor asked the mom to turn the TV off, put her phone away, and remove the infant from the baby walker. The home visitor sat on a quilt that she spread out on the floor. Rather than follow the lead of the home visitor, mom went to sit on the couch with the infant until the home visitor asked mom to join her on the floor. Mom continued to hold him until the home visitor asked her to sit the infant on the floor. Mom struggled, trying to get the infant to bend his legs at the hip, but he struggled against mom and started crying. It was at that time, the home visitor realized the child was not able to sit on the floor without support at 8 months old! The home visitor asked mom how much time he spent in the baby walker in front of the TV to which mom replied “all the time”. The home visitor also noticed the infant was not producing any sounds. When asked, mom indicated she did not read to him as she did not have any books. Mom also indicated she did not talk to him.

Through the Early Head Start home based program, the home visitor spent 1.5 hours each week with mom and infant. The home visitor helped mom to understand and become his first teacher; instructing mom on the significance of floor time to help him through the developmental stages. Nutrition, health and safety

issues were addressed. The home visitor taught mom how to observe and praise him for behavior she wanted repeated. Homework and an empowerment plan were developed, and mom’s and infant’s successes were celebrated each week! Mom has been so successful in the program, her 11 month old infant has gone through the traveling skills developmental stage of sitting, scooting (instead of crawling), and walking with very little support in just three months. He is beginning to talk, is laughing and is able to follow basic directions such as wave bye-bye! He is thriving because mom truly became his first teacher!

Patricia Wolff
Iowa

Twenty years ago my husband left me with two sets of twins, 6 months and two years old. I was the sole provider and had to work, Iowa had a day care subsidy and because a new daycare had just opened I was able to place all 4 children in the same center. At first we were trying to figure out how to place the boys in as many as 3 separate daycares, a home day care could not legally care for all of my children because there were limits on the number of children under a certain age. I struggled for years to keep a roof over our head and food in their bellies with very, very little help from their father. Because I had a child with special needs (Autism Spectrum), it was a constant struggle to keep daycare. My annual income would pay for housing, health care, food, and the bare essentials but could not accommodate four children in day care. There were few alternatives, a shelter or foster care I suppose. Now my boys are grown up, working, and paying taxes; two are serving in the military in

Now my boys are grown up, working, and paying taxes; two are serving in the military in Afghanistan. My family could not have survived without the child care subsidy.

Afghanistan. My family could not have survived without the child care subsidy and we're constantly in danger of losing it, if I earned a dollar too much I could lose the whole subsidy. Those were tough years, but we survived with a lot of help and a lot of creativity.

Elizabeth Hendrix
Des Moines, Iowa

I volunteer for the Head Start programs here in Iowa and I'm very disappointed to hear a bill has been passed to cut funding. Times are tight for everyone and I understand tough decisions need to be made. However, cutting early education and childcare for our youth will only continue to make things worse for those who need it the most. As a country we have the obligation to set our children up with the tools they will need to survive in the world. Early education has been proven time and time again to be one of the most beneficial things children can be provided. I hope this along with the other letters will help to make a difference.

Alison Mattas
Des Moines, Iowa

**As a country we have the obligation
to set our children up with the tools they
will need to survive in the world.**

Kansas

My name is Kathleen Brown and I've been the lead teacher in the Bug Garden for 25 years. We are a nationally accredited center with a QRS rating of 5. I have witnessed time and time again the advantages of what a NAEYC accredited program can do to enrich the lives of the very young. I work with the toddlers age 12 months to 30 months and by providing these young minds with the tools that a quality early childhood program delivers is by far the biggest and greatest advantage we can give these children. A quality program influences all areas of development and teachers that are educated in and aware of child development are prepared to meet the needs of this very special group of students. A simple thing like age appropriate books in the classroom can lead to early developmental skills in language and literacy. The list of benefits goes on and on and the children in our care need you President Obama to make sure those benefits are available to ALL children. So little children, little children what do you see? I see the President advocating for me.

Kathleen Brown
Kansas

My daughter made HUGE social and emotional gains during her pre-K year. She was blessed with a teacher that built her confidence and loved her as his own.

Jessica Lyon
Wichita, Kansas

Where I live, there are only 78 child care spots for infants at registered Douglas County child care centers' for the estimated 1,150 babies born in Lawrence every year. This does not include those babies, like my daughter, who were born at other regional medical centers. At daycare centers, those spots can cost upwards of \$1,000 per month, and many require reserving (and paying) for those spots, sometimes several months in advance, before the child is old enough to go to daycare. That's 1/3 of my income as a postdoc, and we also have three school-age children, making daycare centers totally unaffordable. We were fortunate to find a wonderful licensed in-home provider with more reasonable rates, but those spots are also difficult to get.

Kristin Young
Lawrence, Kansas

**providing these young minds with
the tools that a quality early childhood
program delivers is by far the biggest
and greatest advantage we can
give these children.**



Kentucky

I have two young children in daycare. They attend a facility which is designated for faculty, staff, and students of the University I work for, as well as participants of a program called Scholar House, which helps single mothers obtain a college degree. We love the environment there, it is a great school. However, we may be forced to take them out due to how expensive it is. My husband lost his job in the beginning of this year, and we applied for daycare assistance. We were placed on a limited program that helped us tremendously! The only problem is that the funding for that program ran out at the end of September. We went from paying \$ 115.00 per week for both children, to a whopping \$310.00 per week!! Needless to say we are now about 3 weeks behind and don't know where to turn. My husband is currently working again, but making half of what he previously did. The next time I receive a paycheck, the entire thing will go to daycare, which of course leaves no money for bills or food. Not to mention that we will not even be caught up. The price of childcare is absurd and most people cannot afford it. It makes it very hard to keep a job when you are basically working to pay for child care. I think that child care should be something that is reasonable enough for all families to afford so that people can get back to work. It's good for families, the economy, and the country in general. It's time for the government to start taking better care of the families of this country.

Amy Reid
Louisville, Kentucky

I think that child care should be something that is reasonable enough for all families to afford so that people can get back to work. It's good for families, the economy, and the country in general.

Louisiana

When my daughter graduated from nursing school in 2013, it was evident how important the impact of early childhood education is. She started her education at the age of 2, and reached high levels of achievement since then. She passed honors, gifted and accelerated classes with little effort. Other children can also achieve these accomplishments if provided with early childhood education programs.

Valerie Milligan
Jackson, Louisiana

As a teacher, I look back at the moment I fell in love with education and know that it was in the first years of my schooling. I had an amazing experience in pre-school which taught me how to interact with others (social development) and improved greatly my vocabulary. We always sang songs, so I very easily understood rhyming words and poetic devices. My early childhood education helped me be able to read. Thanks, Ms. Pat!

Allison Bergeron
Breaux Bridge, Louisiana

I attended Lakeview Pre-school. Low pupil teacher ratio, a quality lunch program and two gifted teachers made my early foundations for future success a realization. EVERY CHILD MUST ATTEND QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS! Please mandate early childhood education. It will save this nation.

Kimberly Flair
Metairie, Louisiana

I have a niece that was exposed to a variety of learning experiences in preschool. I, being an educator, influenced her parents' decision to enroll her. Her experiences were the result of her being well ahead of others in her class when she entered school. She was very successful throughout her educational path. That foundation of learning made all the difference in the world.

Warren Holmes
New Iberia, Louisiana

As a former elementary school teacher, I can attest to the fact that experience in a high-quality early learning setting has the potential to make or break a child's academic career. In high-quality Pre K, children gain the social, emotional, and academic building blocks they need to succeed. As Louisiana moves towards implementation of the Common Core standards, it's becoming more and more important for children to show up to Kindergarten with strong literacy and numeracy foundations so that they are ready to learn!

Amy Qualliotine
Clinton, Louisiana

**Low pupil teacher ratio, a quality
lunch program and two gifted
teachers made my early foundations
for future success a realization.**



Maine

Mary Cox knew early in her pregnancy that her son would be born with a bilateral cleft lip and palate. And after Kayden arrived in the world, he underwent seven surgeries in Boston, all before 18 months, to correct the extensive deformation. There were concerns about his ongoing development, so his public-health nurse referred him to several professionals, such as a speech therapist at Waldo County General Hospital. Today, at 2½, Kayden has the vocabulary of a 5-year-old and speaks in complex sentences, although he's still working on his articulation. But part of that success was the collaboration the speech therapist had with another early referral.

That was to WCAP's Early Head Start program. Once a week, an EHS home visitor comes into the Cox home to work with Kayden and help with his development. The process begins with an Ages & Stages Questionnaire to identify challenge areas. From there, the home visitor works with Kayden in fun, engaging activities that are intensive evaluation and education — but looks and feels like playtime.

That works well for an energetic guy like Kayden, and great for Mary.

"I love having a goal, knowing what I should be looking at, knowing what his strengths are," said Mary. "And they make it fun, too."

The home visitor observes the family engaging in activities with Kayden, and then suggests ways to get additional benefits from the activity. For example, the Coxes worked with Kayden to count and stack blocks, which works his brain in two ways. But the EHS visitor suggested a new idea: line up alternating long and short blocks, and ask Kayden which comes next.

And when Kayden was learning colors, the home visitor took him on outdoor color walks to find colors in nature and in the neighborhood — turning an educational task into physical exercise and an entertaining time with the family.

Such activities are not by accident. The EHS home visitors carefully track children's development to mark

what are called milestones — ensuring the children can do certain tasks at certain ages. If they're behind, the visitor knows what areas to work on, and can suggest activities to help, without needing to spend much money to do them.

"These are all things that families can do in their homes," Mary said. "You use supplies that people usually have already." Kayden's parents are intimately involved with his development. Her parents, who live downstairs in the house, also spend a lot of time with him. "There's always somebody around that really cares for him, and really, really wants to see him grow and develop," said Kayden's father,

Kenneth. That's key, the parents agree, and some parents might need a little boost in that department — a boost EHS can give a family that needs it.

But despite the success of EHS, its government funding could very well be endangered next year as across-the-board cuts for 2013 are considered as part of the debt-limit deal. "That's scary, because I just think what we've done is pure gold," Mary said. "A lot of that is that we've had tremendous support from them."

"It's just like a house: If you break the foundation, it isn't going to work," said Kenneth. "When they cut back all these Head Start programs, that's really what they're doing is they're breaking the kids' education right from the start."

Mary's mother, Kate Sweetland, didn't believe that Early Head Start would work with Kayden. "I thought, 'What can they do for him?'" she recalled. "We read to him already. He eats vegetables." But well into the program, she's a woman with a changed mind. "It really has done a lot for him," she said. "This has been a fantastic program. Even the doubting grandmother is well convinced. And the people in it are just incredibly good people."

Mary Cox
Maine

Jane moved to Maine to be with the father of her 2 year old and twins on the way, leaving behind her community and family supports. Initially she lived with her boyfriend's family. However, things became too difficult, and she was asked to move out. So she arrived at the homeless shelter with a toddler and 2-week-old twins in tow. Jane's story with Early Head Start began in October of 2011, when she was referred to a KVCAP/Educare playgroup held in collaboration with the Mid-Maine Homeless Shelter.

As a teen mother, Jane was truly a child herself, and did not have a good understanding of all the roles and responsibilities of being a parent. But with encouragement from the Early Head Start and staff and the staff at the shelter, Jane and her daughters regularly participated in playgroups, and was able to get the younger girls enrolled quickly into our Home Based Early Head Start program. In addition to the playgroups, the family participated in weekly visits, either on the Educare campus or at the shelter. Jane took an active role in all visits, engaging the children while participating in age-appropriate activities and learning games. Jane took full advantage of the program environment, offering her infants lots of "tummy time" which was not a safe option at the shelter.

Jane met with the Home Visitor at Early Head Start, and worked with her to develop a Family Partnership Agreement. The first priority was to find permanent housing. After six months in the shelter, Jane received a voucher and secured an apartment for her family. She continued with Home Based Early Head Start, moving the visits to her new home. Jane took part in screening completion for all of her daughters, taking initiative to seek evaluation and support services for her eldest daughter's speech and language needs.

Jane obtained a full-time job, participated in parenting education classes, maintained her apartment and participated in counseling. Through the whole process, Jane continued to participate in weekly visits with her Home Visitor through the Early Head Start program, and spent as much time with her daughters

I believe every child should have the opportunity to begin their formative education with such dedication, intellect, empathy, love and laughter.

as possible. Jane's relationships with program staff helped her to feel like her voice was being heard and that she could make positive changes in her life.

In the midst of finding safety, stability, and shelter, Jane has been able to maintain her focus on the importance of her role as a parent. With the encouragement and close connection with Head Start Staff, Jane has come to understand that she is the most important educator in her children's lives. No matter the obstacles, Jane is committed to helping her children learn, grow and flourish.

Anonymous
Maine

I feel blessed that our son was able to participate in the CHOICES program at Family Focus. I am grateful to his wonderful teacher, Miss Emma, who provided a fun, energetic, safe, and well-structured learning environment. She encouraged positive social interactions, independence, learning and emphasized play. I believe it is to our child's benefit that his first introduction to school was engaging, and focused on developing the wholeness of his character, as well as providing a strong foundation in the fundamentals of reading, writing and arithmetic. I believe every child should have the opportunity to begin their formative education with such dedication, intellect, empathy, love and laughter.

Rachel Hunter
Maine

Maryland

Every day I see smiling faces on our 3-5 year-old children. They love coming to preschool because we make their day engaging and meaningful. We are consistent in our expectations, so they have learned to trust us, thus allowing us to guide them through the educational and social maze of their school day. Because our teachers are highly qualified, our students are receiving a well-rounded age- and developmentally-appropriate experience. They leave us more than prepared to be successful in their next school.

Leslie Oppenheimer
College Park, Maryland

I was a child with a speech impairment. If it had not been for an early intervention and help, I would probably not be able to communicate as well as I do today. Every child needs early childhood education to receive services that can aide them for the rest of the educational and career lives.

Kate Hoffmann
Baltimore, Maryland

One of our students came from an abusive environment where she was not being sent to school. When she arrived at our school at the age of 5, she did not speak and only grunted. We placed her in the class of an outstanding PK teacher who worked tirelessly with her and now today she is a thriving, confident young student whose learning gap is increasingly closing because of the support, compassion, and strategies provided to her by a PK teacher and a teacher team that followed her through elementary school.

Tia Coutroupis
Baltimore, MD

My daughter has been enrolled in a child care program since she was 18 months old. After some time we moved from that center because of location inconveniences. The next center soon showed that it was not what I was looking for to keep her academically and socially interested. I am excited to say that I found a new center during the past spring which is a perfect match for us both. She rolls out of bed every morning telling some of what will be included in her schedule for that day. Her pre-school teacher is pleasant and displays a genuine interest in her student's education and well-being. Raya is always mimicking what her teacher told the class and the many activities that are planned. I feel good about leaving her there every morning, which is a great feeling that every parent should have about the child center which they have chosen for his/her child.

Yvette Turner
Baltimore, Maryland

I have been a teacher of Pre-Kindergarten for 8 years before becoming a school media specialist. During my teaching career I found that the early childhood program provided a valuable learning experience for the young children. As result of this early education students were able to achieve greater success in the academic program. The children were able to adjust to school better and have a greater love for learning. The students who had this early childhood experience made a much better transition to the educational curriculum in kindergarten. I feel that the early childhood experience is a rewarding experience and should be available for every young child.

Mary Minnis
Upper Marlboro, Maryland

I am a parent of two children under 5, and a psychologist who specializes in working with children, adolescents and young adults. I see early learning and childcare from both sides of the coin - as a parent who needs to find affordable care for my daughters that I can feel good about, and as a professional who works with children and families to find programs that meet their needs. From both points of view we do not have enough high quality, affordable options for childcare and early education, and the lack of these resources is directly related to a host of societal problems, including the education lag, juvenile delinquency, obesity and high/increasing rates of dropout.

For my own children, we had a nanny for a time (about 6 - 9 months), but when our nanny graduated from her nursing program, we struggled to find daycare that was able to work with our part time schedule, affordable, and that provided a high quality of care. Those that were willing to take our daughter part time tended to be large centers where there were too many children, too few (and under-qualified) staff, and not enough individual care for an infant. Many family daycares, which provide a smaller environment and more individual attention, cannot afford to give up 50% of their legally allowed infant slots for a child who will be there only part time. We were fortunate to find a newly opened daycare that was willing to take our daughter on a part time basis, and our younger daughter joined her this year. I am grateful to have a stable, loving, small, family-oriented environment to care for my children when I am at work.

As a professional I know that caregiver stability is a crucial consideration during the early childhood years, and I am grateful that I am able to work a part time schedule in order to be with my daughters while continuing to run my own business and work as a professional. However, these things come at a cost - 15,600.00 per year, to be exact. Even as a well-paid professional, that is a chunk of change to come up with, and it is not even close to being one of the more expensive options out there. Additionally, when the numbers are crunched, even that amount means that the person who cares for my children is paid between 8 - 10 per hour. Without benefits. I made more than that as a secretary! On the professional side of things I often see the results of children whose parents must work and often cannot afford high quality care. Behavioral difficulties, emotional difficulties, and stress in family relationships are the least of these concerns. Even children who qualify for Head Start programs often don't have access to them due to scheduling, transportation, or behavioral difficulties. The research tells us clearly that supporting stable and high quality caregiving during early development is critical to the emotional, developmental and physical health of our children. We should do better. We could do better. I don't know why we do not do better.

Janice Lepore
Arbutus, Maryland

I am the mother to an adorable 16 month old girl, Ava. I wish I could stay home with her full-time but my husband and I cannot make it work financially. I am lucky, though, because I found an amazing daycare very close to my husband's work, and not too far from mine. We all love her daycare, even Ava, and know she is in great hands and learning a lot when she is there. This daycare is not cheap, though, and we would never be able to afford a second child at this place, as we have already had to cut back on things like our 401K contributions and savings just to make ends meet as it is. The cost of two children at this facility is only \$200 a month less than what I make each month. I may as well quit my job. So herein lies my dilemma: we want more children and don't want Ava to be an only child. But I want the best for her and a safe, reliable daycare is paramount. In order to have the family we want, we'd have to move her to an in-home daycare, which I am not comfortable with. Do I keep my family small and rob Ava of siblings? Or do I put her in an inferior daycare? Or do I quit my job all together? This is a decision I shouldn't have to make.

Jennifer Sproul
Middle River, Maryland

What I see each day since we joined the local school system in a private-public Pre-k program 13 years ago. I see:

The implementation of the 10 NIEER benchmarks of best practices delivered in developmentally appropriate practice.

Staff to child ratio at 1:6 and groups size of 20 four year olds.

The power of combining resources from grants and in-kind contributions of child care and public school.

Breakfast to all the children in our center.

Evidence that lending library books are being read by parents to all children.

More opportunity for parent involvement and more parents volunteering.

Book club events that help children to build at home libraries.

Competent caring teachers who work very hard for very little financial compensation, regardless of education levels and who have not had a raise in income for far too long.

Outcomes that show the children are ready for kindergarten, regardless of income level or gender

A full day, year round program that helps children to be successful for kindergarten and supports parents who work or attend school.

A partnership that blends funds to support lower income families.

Parents that have the opportunity to see and speak to their child's teachers every day at drop off and pick up.

Teachers who have an opportunity to build relationships with children's families at drop off & pick up every day.

Children who go on field trips or participate in special events brought to the center to learn more about their world.

Child care teachers and public school teachers who learn together at in-services as well as from each other.

How hard my public school colleagues work to support children, families and teachers under severe budget constraints.

Oversight to ensure that responsibilities are met, in very respectful and positive ways

Joy on the faces of the children in the program, as well as confidence in their abilities to try new things and do jobs well

Stress on the faces of all the early childhood educators involved in documenting requirements and meeting deadlines required of this grant as well as the compliance with multiple agencies

A caring cohesive community of learners, young and old

A place where parents are invited to participate in their child's education

This is what I see every day at Greenbelt Children's Center.

Flora Gee
Greenbelt, Maryland



Massachusetts

At Horizons for Homeless Children, a Massachusetts based non-profit organization providing high-quality early education, to 175 homeless children each day, we see children reaching milestones: taking their first steps, sharing with their friends, or mastering their ABCs. Our goal is to ensure that children in our early education centers are ready for school success. Jamai's story is one example of how we are helping young homeless children learn, play, and thrive. "I'm ready for kindergarten," five-year old Jamai announces proudly as he spells his name and recites his ABCs. Jamai first arrived at Horizons for Homeless Children as an infant after his mother and older brother became homeless and moved into shelter. Jamai was a happy child, but by age three, he was struggling with sharing and following directions. This made learning difficult. He often played by himself and wouldn't explore new toys, games, or activities. Jamai's teacher, Amanda, worked closely with him, encouraging him to explore his feelings and interact with his peers. Today, Jamai is completing preschool and will be going to kindergarten in the fall. He has made strides in learning to talk about his feelings and takes direction from his teachers. He loves using his imagination to reenact stories and he can often be found playing dress up games like super heroes with his friends. He also adores animals. On a recent class field trip to the Franklin Park Zoo, Jamai lit up with excitement, as he named almost every animal that he saw. "He's funny, he's smart, he has a great personality, and he's really progressed a lot since he's come into preschool," notes Amanda proudly. "He's able to take turns, he's able to share, and he's able to talk about how he's feeling and what he wants." Jamai has mastered many pre-kindergarten skills like his letters and their sounds, how to write and spell his name, and how to count. Because of the skills he has gained at Horizons, Jamai is ready for school success.

Kennis Matthew
Massachusetts

Each day, from September to June, I walk into my classroom feeling happy. I am happy because my classroom is a safe, fun and comfortable learning environment where children are free to explore and participate. For me, watching the learning process is amazing. Small children are like sponges. It continues to amaze me watching children come in with no letter identification skills and leave being able to identify 26 upper and lowercase letters and associate sounds with them. That is what early education is about.

Lisa Antonelli
Malen, MA

My younger cousin was one of the first members of my family that attended pre-school. My family was weary about sending my generation to pre-school. Now that we are older we are sending our children. She learned so much in a short time. She was able to attain some basic reading skills before she started kindergarten. I also like that she spent her time learning and developing her skills instead of being home in front of a TV.

Darcel Hunt
Boston, Massachusetts

My godchild was diagnosed as developmentally delayed when he was only 1-2 years old. He benefited from home visits so that he would not fall farther behind.

Jessica Tang
Boston, Massachusetts

As a classroom teacher in MA it is rare that students don't attend preschool but most often parents pay a high cost for private preschool. Students who attend preschool come to school ready to learn. The difference between students who have attended preschool and those who have not is obvious to classroom teachers from the moment students enter the classroom, as they are often not prepared for the academic rigor of a kindergarten classroom. The same goes for those students who attend 1/2 day rather than full day kindergarten programs. You can't learn the same amount in 1/2 a day as you can in a full day program.

Lesley Kelly
Medway, Massachusetts

I experience a positive feeling when people who have graduated high school come to my classroom to visit me and tell me how successful they are. They also tell me of their fond memories of their experiences in Kindergarten¹.

Jeanette Lake
Roslindale, Massachusetts

Finding quality child care is a concern for new parents as they plan to return to work. I was one of the privileged few who had an amazing child care provider I could trust with the care of my infant son. That was the only way I could have returned to class after child birth. More parents especially teachers will return to work if they know their child will be placed in caring hands. Please invest in quality child care programs!

Nonne Obiora
Boston, Massachusetts

I currently am in a district that provides full day classes for K0, K1 and K2. In working with the parents of the elementary students, I was able to inform them of this resource for their younger children. They then went to the parent center and enrolled their younger children. Fortunately, there were seats and the children started in December of that school year. This resource benefitted the child, the parents and the community. Also, the K1 and K2 teachers thanked me because those students will remain in our school and they will also be more prepared for the upper grades.

Teresa Reaves
Randolph, Massachusetts

As a former Jumpstart Corps Member in Boston, I can personally attest to the impact high quality pre-school can have on children from underserved communities. I saw children I worked with improve their interpersonal and reading skills over a period of months because they developed trusting relationships with their teachers and Jumpstart Corps Members. More children need to have access to pre-school. I hope you will vote to expand access to universal pre-k nationwide.

Patrick Johnson
Brewster, Massachusetts

While the main goal of Jumpstart may be to provide our preschoolers with high-quality early learning, I know that what it accomplishes is much farther reaching than that. In my time at Jumpstart I have seen children who at the beginning of the year would not speak, by the last session were the first ones to shout out in excitement about the book we were reading. I have seen teachers who began to implement classroom activities the way that they saw us do it because they had children who never paid attention finally being engaged in the lesson. Most of all I have seen the way that both I and my team members have been transformed by our time with this program. Jumpstart teaches you how important you are to your community, and that individuals CAN make a difference, and you know it's true every time one of your children learns a

letter in their name or uses a new word during Dramatic Play. I am beyond proud to now be serving a 3rd term and be a Team Leader for such an amazing program.

Amanda Morse
Boston, Massachusetts

Education is a basic human right. It is one that should be guaranteed to all, beginning at a young age. Pre-school is a time for children to learn how to behave in a classroom. It allows them to learn basic rules and routines. It gives them the chance to interact with other students, understanding how to work as a group. That being said, not all preschools are created equal. High-quality education allows children to learn in a hands-on, energetic way. I have seen children come into a high-quality classroom, unable to read or even recite the alphabet. After a year in this type of classroom, these same children are reading their names, writing letters and singing the alphabet with gusto. Without a high-quality preschool, these children would fall far behind their peers. They would begin kindergarten far behind others, and find it nearly impossible to catch up. A high-quality preschool produces successful kids, kids who are capable of holding their own and going far in life.

Amanda Kennedy
Bridgewater, Massachusetts

I saw children I worked with improve their interpersonal and reading skills over a period of months because they developed trusting relationships with their teachers and Jumpstart Corps Members.

Michigan

To this day I clearly remember how rhyming words tickled my brain - like when my father explained to me under a star filled sky that infinity went on, and on also tickled my brain, like the conscious shift I experienced when my Uncle David Angus lifted me out of the snow and put me on his shoulder's (first time any adult had did this) as a group of family members walked the snowy lane along The Luft family game reserve. All are moments with educators in and out of school which altered my thinking so much that I actually could feel in my brain flexing, like one feels lifting a weight with their arm. Not all children are as fortunate as I was to grow up with many family elders as close neighbors, on a working farm, in a family with a long history of educators. Fun, stimulating early education of every child is important for every adult, every child bears in them great potential and hope for a sensible future for all people. There is no way to know which child will have the gifts to grasp the needed answer to a multitude of problems we all face, or when these gifts will come forward. Cutting off the means of early education for all is a mistake that should be rectified. So is making a college education so expensive that it is out of reach to many. The world is enriched by an educated and engaging populous.

Janice Luft
Michigan

Jason came to us unable to speak, and he was diagnosed with ADD amongst some other things. He could not feed himself, putting him to sleep was a challenge and he was 4 wearing diapers. Within a month of our per-school program he was feeding himself, by month 2, he was trying to communicate with us. And by 6 months he was able to nap along with the other children. Jason is one of many children who benefit from Pre-K programs. He still has a long way to go but in time he will catch up to children his age. In my work I have seen so many children benefit from these programs. I have watched my last group of children who

are now 18 -19 years of age, all but the ones I pointed out early (due to non-parental support) have all gone off to college or a trade school. This speaks volumes of how a good program works with the right teachers in place, and parental support.

Kisha Emanuel-Durrell
Southfield, Michigan

My children, two girls and a boy, all attended Head Start in Genesee County, Michigan. When my daughters were in Head Start, I volunteered in the classroom a lot, then served on the Parent Policy Committee and Parent Policy Council as the Secretary of both. Through these experiences I learned a lot about early childhood. I applied for and was accepted to the CDA program. This was a College program accreditation that certified me to be a Teacher Assistant in the classroom. From there I went on to not only work in Head Start, but to go on for my Associates Degree in Child Development. This enabled me to be a Lead Teacher in a child care Preschool setting. This was 25 years ago. My daughters have both followed in my foot-steps. Their children went to Head Start, and they have both decided to work with children. Because of the help we got from Early Childhood Education through the Head Start Program, we found our heart's desire, and our self-esteem and pride.

Lorraine Ayers
Michigan

As a retired nurse I have seen first -hand what poverty does in regards to opportunity. To prevent the next generation being stuck in the same situation it is critical that young children have learning opportunities and not be passed over because their parents cannot or will not help them learn.

Marie Leven
Flushing, Michigan



In 1992, I began my teaching career with a part-time position in the Taylor Head Start program here in Michigan. From DAY ONE my heart was won over by this excellent preschool program!!! I have truly never met a more dedicated and caring staff than the seasoned teachers in this program! I went on to teach Head Start for thirteen years in Berkley, Michigan and I currently teach for Detroit Public Schools. The families that I have worked with over the course of my twenty years of teaching have inspired and amazed me. These families work very hard to give their children what they need to survive and thrive in a difficult urban setting. It is my mission and my passion to continue working with these families and teaching their children to embrace the value of education. I continue to stay in contact with many of my former Head Start families through emails, phone calls and Facebook. It always amazes me to see how each of them has grown and how many of them REMAIN friends with classmates from preschool! They form a bond in my classroom that lasts a very long time. I am PROUD to be a part of the Head Start program; for many, it is the foundation and early education needed for at-risk urban families.

Dawn Bruce
Wixom, MI

My son, Joseph, will be 12 in a couple weeks! I am a single mother and was working a full time job when Joe began Head Start, at 3 years old. He was not the most talkative child, but soon after, his vocabulary exploded! When he was 4, he was diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder. I fully credit the staff of his Head Start class with potty-training Joseph. Without that early education, instruction in social behavior and the patience, and acceptance of that staff, Joseph would not have gotten the services he needed to continue reaching his potential. They prepared him to

learn to read by the end of kindergarten along with the rest of the children in his general education class. Early education is vital, especially now with the increased rates of autism spectrum disorders, to early diagnosis for children to receive the services they need to be successful in school and in life.

Heidi Gould
Michigan

I am a Early Childhood Special Education Teacher. My school district does not qualify for Head Start or other at risk pre school programs other than special education. If I have a student who responds to interventions and is capable of succeeding in a regular pre k classroom but has a family with financial need, there is not an option for the student. The student who may benefit most from a pre k program misses out on a critical year of learning. This has been a distressing aspect of my work and needs to change.

Kimberly Lockwood
Novi, Michigan

Without early childhood education and Head Start my life would be different. With the help of the teachers I've been able to help my son read and I read better now. Without the help of the head start our learning would be decreased and I would be unable to help him in the future. As a single father, it is hard enough to work 40 hours and help my son so please take into consideration that we're spending for the future of our children.

Tobin Conway
Michigan

Minnesota

We are a working class family that is working very hard but can barely afford to make ends meet. We receive no food stamps or financial assistance. We have been eligible for child care assistance since 2011, but there are no funds available. Thanks to the Promise Neighborhood Scholarship our son is able to attend a high quality preschool. He is in speech therapy, occupational therapy, and play therapy for anxiety. If anyone needed preschool, it's our son! I don't think there are words to express what this has meant for his development and preparation for school and our peace of mind. It has also allowed us the freedom to work, study, get ahead, and pay more taxes and contribute more to society. It seems like all the parents I meet at this school are lawyers. What are the children of non-lawyers supposed to do if they aren't as lucky as us to live in a promise neighborhood?

Amanda Tallen
Minnesota

I was a Head Start student when I was younger. I can still remember my mom visiting and working in our classroom. This experience helped to foster a love of learning that took me from my Head Start Classroom to a master's degree in education.

Monica Maloney
Kasson, Minnesota

As a kindergarten teacher I see the need for early childhood education every day especially for my low income students. Without head start and other programs these students come to me struggling to catch up with their peers.

Anna Cherney
Duluth, Minnesota

As a Family Resource Advocate for the Way to Grow program I was able to hook families up with resources

that promoted early childhood health and preparedness for school. We assisted families with nutritional food access and preparation, parenting classes, early learning books and in-home learning. My families became much more interactive, parents felt more secure in getting their children ready for school and families entered their children ready to start kindergarten.

Mary Kunesh
Golden Valley, Minnesota

Early childhood brought my son and I into an environment which was both educational and fun for each of us. We really bonded!

Stephen Cade
Northfield, Minnesota

In Minnesota, most districts fund ECFE and ECSE classes (Early Childhood Family Education and Early Childhood Special Education). Kindergarten teachers say (and they said this with my two sons) that they can tell the kids who went through ECFE from the kids who didn't within the first 3 weeks of school, because they come in ready to go with the skills needed to be successful in school. ECSE identifies children at the earliest stages to get them the intervention they need. The whole program serves to educate not just kids but their entire families, teaching healthy habits and engaging families with the public school system. It is the best investment we can make in our children, and I don't understand why every state doesn't fund the ECFE model like Minnesota does!

Audra Lind-Albrecht
Brainerd, Minnesota

Early Childhood Educators make a difference in our community by preparing children for school and providing parenting support. We love them!

Deborah Johnson
Prior Lake, Minnesota



Both of my children attended Early Childhood and Family Education programs in Buffalo, Minnesota. Those programs taught me how to be a better and more informed parent. I learned what to expect of my children at each developmental stage. I attended parenting classes with other parents and we were able to learn from each other and to encourage each other. My children had the opportunity to be taught by experts in early childhood education and they had the opportunity to socialize with children of their own age. ECFE is one of the most valuable programs I have observed after living in California and New Jersey. Early childhood education is vital to our children's education. Any stages of learning readiness missed along the way impair a child's learning for life. This is one program that should not be cut in any way. Our children are our future.

Wanda Sapatnkear
Wayzata, Minnesota

I have just completed my 22nd year as a teacher in an Early Childhood program. I have taught hundreds of kids new songs and read more stories than I could count. When I get to work each day I am greeted by kids excited to learn and experience new things in the world around them. They look forward to playing with their "best friend" or meeting new friends. They learn to work out their conflicts with others and how to ask for help when they need it. They also learn about manners, following rules, and how to be a good friend. We start to introduce letters in our early preschool room so they begin to recognize the letters that make up the thousands of words they will be exposed to before entering kindergarten. When I look into the eyes of each child I see a life time of potential. To me each child is like a piece of clay that becomes shaped with each new experience they have. How humbled I am to know I have an impact on who they will become one day.

Early Childhood Teacher
Apple Valley, Minnesota

As a kindergarten teacher I see the need for early childhood education every day especially for my low income students. Without Head Start and other programs these students come to me struggling to catch up with their peers.

Over the course of the past three years, my son and daughter have both attended a child care center in Plymouth, MN. I was fortunate enough to be approached by the director in regard to qualifying for our state's early childhood education scholarship.

Because of this gracious scholarship, I was able to relieve some of the stress of whether I could continue her education or not, based on my financial situation. The scholarship that she received has made all the difference in the world to me. As a single parent, I struggle with having to pick and choose which opportunities I am able to afford for both of my kids. This funding has allowed me to keep my kids together and provide countless opportunities for learning.

Her educational growth has been remarkable. In addition to that, my own comfort and security (knowing that she is in safe surroundings and growing and learning every day) has been an added blessing in my life.

Parent
Plymouth, Minnesota

After I picked up my son today, he walked out into the lobby where the assistant director had a map on the screen. He walked over to the screen and said, "That is the Mississippi River!" and pointed to a river on the screen. At second look, it was the Mississippi! I asked him where he had learned that and he replied, "My teacher! She knows all about the United States!"

Parent
Rochester, Minnesota

My little girl has been in a high quality childcare program since she was three months old. I can't even begin to tell you all of the wonderful things that she has learned as a result of her experiences in childcare. From the time she was an infant, each and every teacher has nurtured her, taught her, loved her, and helped her to grow in ways that can only be explained as "amazing"!

Now that she is three, the experiences continue to enrich her life and teach her new things each day.

When my daughter goes to Kindergarten, I am fully and 100% confident that because of her amazing early childhood education, she is going to be prepared and ready for Kindergarten and beyond. As lawmakers and government officials, I encourage you to take into consideration the enormous impact that early childhood education has on the children that take part in it. Please help me and other families make a Strong Start for Children! It is the most valuable investment that you can ever make.

Parent
Minneapolis, Minnesota

When I had my first boy in infant care I constantly relied on the teachers in there to help me and guide me. This was a big relief for me as a new mom and I had trust and confidence that my son was in good hands, safe and cuddled whenever they could.

Now that he starting Kindergarten in a week I have no worries about him being able to manage all day Kindergarten and the demands he will have. His younger brother is following in his footsteps and we have every confidence that in 2 years he will be just as ready for Kindergarten.

Parent
Plymouth, Minnesota

My son started care at a day care center at 3 months. I am a Registered Nurse in Oncology. I wanted to stay home with my son even longer than 3 months but I was unable to due to the demand in my job for patient care. I am so fortunate to have found a care center for my son where he feels loved, accepted, comfortable, and is able to be an individual. My son's day care providers put much time, energy, love and education into my sons learning. My son has learned so many wonderful things in life so far. I have my daycare providers to thank for that. I know that each and every one of them do the very best they can every day. I appreciate how every day care provider takes that little extra in there day, to impact my son's entire lifetime. I am very grateful for that.

Parent
Eagan, Minnesota

When I first decided to put my daughter into a new preschool, I did a lot of research. I have seen a vast improvement in Gabrielle's writing skills, vocabulary and knowledge of basic skills she will need as she starts full-day kindergarten this September. I know that she is ready, willing and able to do all of the tasks asked of her by her teachers and do her best at the same time. Our child care center experience has meant wonderful things for my daughter's education and her self confidence in knowing she can do anything she puts her mind to. They truly have prepared her for kindergarten and I am forever grateful.

Parent
Eagan, Minnesota

Anderson is an English language learner who will be working to improve his picture naming as well as his fluency and English vocabulary, all of which are critical skills to becoming a strong reader and succeeding in kindergarten this fall.

During recent assessments, Anderson, who is Hmong, met or exceeded 4 out of 5 of our benchmarks for kindergarten readiness. Based on preliminary scores, Anderson is on track to meet state standards for 3rd grade Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments.

These assessments help us to target skill development in the areas of Picture Naming, Rhyming, Alliteration, Letter Recognition and Letter Sound Recognition. They are critical tools in deciding which students are in need of additional support. They also help us evaluate the effectiveness of our work with parents. Anderson and other Way to Grow scholars entering kindergarten in the fall are receiving continued support throughout the summer from their parents and Family Educators' home visits to ensure they are school ready!

When Anderson came to Way to Grow, he knew very few letters and skills. After a few home visits, he could complete most of the activities I'd brought to him. Anderson's parents work very hard with him, support him to do his homework and encourage him to read. On my visits, he is eager to read to me. This child very much wants to learn and is ready to do well in the future. He enjoys reading and drawing pictures and wants to be a pilot when he grows up.

Teacher
Minneapolis, MN

For many of us in the Early Childhood Education field we have always known the difference we are making. But the pride that we feel everyday should be shared. We want everyone to know that we are not just "baby-sitters". We are committed to educating the youngest learners and creating relationships that build a sense of security and trust that will help these kids grow into productive adults.

I have been proud to be the Director of a quality Early Childhood program that not only educates young children, but has built a community of caring adults working together as a family. What have I seen? I

have seen kids who have been exposed to loving adults who are here to teach them how to handle and express their emotions, how to make and keep friends, and how to communicate effectively which leads to a better Kindergarten experience. Many of these kids come from lower income homes which, as we know, can be very stress filled. Quality care helps to lessen the stress in those homes by providing support for the families, and consistency for the kids. We pride ourselves on truly connecting with each family and reaching out to them to offer support and guidance when needed. Our family nights have built a community that is too often lost these days in our neighborhoods. I have a school-age room this year with 30 kids, over half of whom have been with us since they were two years old or younger. So, we are able to grow with these children, and ensure that their families are utilizing all of the resources that are out there for them. Friendships have been built and changes have been made that will forever benefit these kids.

Early Childhood Education can and should be more than just teaching. It's the formation of a community and the creation of a next generation that will be better prepared for what lies ahead.

Early Childhood Program Director
St Paul, Minnesota

Mississippi

Hello, my name is Courtney, and I have twin boys Heath and River that were born at 34 weeks. I have had them involved with several programs. I did this because I feel that it is so crucial in a child's development. They are involved in Early Head Start and Early On. I can tell you just by being involved in these programs it has continued to allow my children to shine. Besides, what's a little education going to hurt, even in the youngest child? I feel it's never too early to start. My boys are delayed in speech and some other minor areas and I can't express to you enough how much they have helped my children. I am a stay at home mother and these wonderful people that have come into my child's life have helped me so much. I cannot express my gratitude enough. They have educated me in so and also helped further my education about a child's development. I am so thankful programs like this exist because it allows my children to not only socialize with people, they are also learning so much. I would hate it if they took these programs away. I feel it is so important to have these. A lot of people think, well they're too young, but really they aren't. This is just my opinion, but I strongly believe in it. It's never too early to learn, especially for a child who's delayed in certain areas.

Courtney Zips
Westland, Mississippi



Missouri

In our program we visit family child care homes and license exempt centers to provide training and support. We love what we do, and often share short stories with our donors. Here are some we like. I hope they will help with the efforts to provide quality experiences for all young children. It is amazing what a dream along with a little “seed money” can do for a childcare program.

Spending less than \$1000.00 to remove a wall dramatically transformed and extended the space and created such enthusiasm that a child’s father build and donated a beautiful wooden book area while the provider spent money of her own on a two child computer station. The environment went from good to incredible because everyone involved (state, provider and parents) contributed and cared. I had a provider that I thought would never change; in the past she had always been brusque, harsh, and uncompassionate when she interacted with children and very resistant to information. And then I visited her after she had attended a group training on temperament; she told me that she had been brought up to believe that you just “made children do what you wanted and forced them to change their ways.” She had been struggling with three children in her classroom, trying to force them to do and react to things the “right” way...her way, but now she knew what had to change was how SHE approached them.

She cried as she shared how the whole atmosphere of the classroom was transformed and each individual child was able to thrive now. I was visiting a home child care provider and discussing the importance of early reading. She stated that the children didn’t like books and didn’t want to listen when she read to them. I asked her about the books she had available to read. When she showed them to me I noticed they were very wordy and many were based on movies. I talked to her about books that would be more developmentally appropriate for her group of children. Because of the Early Childhood funding for our program, I had brought some books to give her

that met her children’s needs. I modeled reading *Duck on a Bike*, by David Shannon. We read the story and made animal sounds together. The children, the child care provider and I had so much fun together. She later joked with me that she was so sick of that book because the children “Made her read it every day.”

On a visit to the infant room I was discussing safe sleep. I provided sleep sacks for the staff to use with the infants. One of the teachers was going to have a baby and she went out and bought them to use at home as well. The next day in another program I was again discussing safe sleep. A parent was dropping off her child and listened to the information. She also said she will purchase sleep sacks to help her baby stay comfortable and safe while sleeping on her back.

Kathy Taber
Missouri

I have experienced the positive impact of high quality pre-k for students in the St. Louis Public Schools by the initiative to expand pre-k within our district. We are providing high quality learning opportunities, social-emotional development, and early literacy skills for 3, 4, and 5 year olds. We also have an initiative with First Books to put FREE books in the hands of our pre-k students.

Yvette Levy
St. Louis, Missouri

Early Childhood is very special to me, especially a good quality foundational education. I was afforded a good early childhood experience, so I wanted my children to experience the same. I was elated when our local wrote a grant to fund Early Childhood for our students in our local and school district.

Anitra Arms
St. Louis, Missouri

There was no early education program in our school system, so I took my children to a Montessori school. They started at 3 yrs old. When they were old enough to transfer into public school, my oldest was put in Kindergarten, even though she could read a bit; write her numbers, ABC's and other things. When tested, she was at first grade level in everything. Policy would not allow her to be moved up, but from that time on, she spent her entire school day, except for lunch and recess, in the grade above her. When she reached 6th grade, she had already had everything taught in that grade the year before and was hurt that the friends she had spent most of her day in school with for 6 years had been promoted to 7th grade and she had been left behind. She said she felt cheated, that she had to sit through lessons she had already had. That was enough to convince me that early childhood education was absolutely a good thing and that every school system should have it and advance children on their maturity and accomplishments-not some concreated idea of rules with no flexibility. She is now a Sr.V.P in a major motion picture studio and I am convinced that the confidence and poise she gained in early childhood education put her on the path to be successful.

Anne Sherwood
Missouri



Montana

My name is Trista Bigart. I have worked as a case manager for Missoula Early Head Start in Missoula, MT for almost four years. I have been with the program for almost 10 years. I first was an infant/toddler teacher in our center base program for 6 years.

I have worked with many families, but I have one that really sticks out in my mind as a success story: I began working with this young boy when he was 14 months old. When I first met him he was living in foster care, I completed about a month of visits with him and this foster mother and then all the sudden he was moved into another foster placement. I completed visits in this home for a good amount of time and then I found out the birth mother was interested in having visits with her son. I started to complete visits with mom and our local DPHHS and these only lasted a short time before his mom started cancelling and not showing to the visits. I then found out his birth father was interested in starting visits. I began visits with him and his father as they were being supervised through a local agency, Evolution Services. The father was very consistent with visits, very interested in the development of his son and VERY interested in doing everything he could and was asked to do to be able to reunite with his son. He asked wonderful questions and had great interactions with his son. He also during this time started visits with his younger daughter and made sure to get her enrolled in our program as well.

So these visits progressed into overnight visits and then unsupervised visits and then finally to the children moving back home with him and his girlfriend. At this time I was only able to complete two more visits as the family had moved out of our county and I couldn't serve them anymore, but I was able to transition them to a case manager in our program that did serve that county. As I was very sad to not work with this family anymore I was also very grateful for the time that I was able to work with them and the support that I was able to give them to reunify. It made me feel so accomplished, I guess would be the word. I love what I do and to be able to do it and see such a positive outcome made me feel wonderful!

Trista Bigart
Missoula, Montana

I am a single parent whose daughter is grown now. But when she was little I used the programs. I believe they really helped my child grow and develop. So if the programs are no longer available to others then how can our new generation have a chance to grow and learn with help. They will not have the chance if the programs are cut off.

Tina Holness
Billings, Montana

As I was very sad to not work with this family anymore I was also very grateful for the time that I was able to work with them and the support that I was able to give them to reunify. It made me feel so accomplished, I guess would be the word. I love what I do and to be able to do it and see such a positive outcome made me feel wonderful!

When my children were young 0-5 yrs, I provided childcare in my home. I had a small family childcare business. I saw many families juggle childcare and work and constantly readjust the delicate balance of needs and necessity. Every family had a different scenario about how they did it. It was amazing that there was not a trend in childcare schedules. All were educated, with the minimum of a college degree. Only one family, during 6 years, had a childcare schedule of 7:45-5:30. The mother of this family was a lawyer, which is one of the highest status jobs and the most competitive. Most families had to become creative with schedules and income in order to succeed and most had extra help from family with childcare or finances. As middle class, white families, they had the tools and the sense of entitlement to solve these problems. The point is WE NEED A CHILDCARE POLICY. We need to reduce economic hardships on families because it is affecting our children, our future. Our country fears taking a stand on ideological issues, like family, but it is time to create nothing but success, nothing but solutions to childcare issues. Every family should feel like success is achievable. Children thrive in healthy environments, where parents feel like they have choices.

Leslie Gallant
Missoula, Montana

At Missoula Public Library we have a number of programs that promote early literacy. One of our most successful programs is Tiny Tales. This program is for

Caregivers have told us stories about their children singing and dancing at home and showing a joy for reading books at the library and at home.

children age 0-36 months and their caregivers. Tiny Tales is filled with songs, rhymes, finger plays, lap sits and a story or two. At the beginning of each program we ask parents to participate because their children learn from them and they can show their children that what we are doing is fun! To make everyone comfortable we always start with the same 2 songs, "If You're Happy and You Know It" and "Gunk Gunk, Went the Little Green Frog". Then it's time for a book. We use books that invite participation or movement. One book is usually plenty and the rest of the time is spent doing finger plays, action songs and lap sits. For many children the most enjoyable part of the program is at the end when we get out the board books for about 15-30 minutes of reading time. It is so much fun to watch children grow and blossom as they continue to attend our programs. Caregivers have told us stories about their children singing and dancing at home and showing a joy for reading books at the library and at home.

Pam Carlton
Missoula, Montana



Nebraska

The Sixpence Early Learning Fund has changed lives for countless Nebraska infants and toddlers. One of the Lincoln Sixpence sites is located in a high school. Here, teen mothers come to school every day while their children receive the highest quality early childhood education in the state. The young parents also take parenting classes, participate in a home visitation program and regularly interact with their kids in literacy and art activities at the center. This is the story of one mother and daughter in the Sixpence program and how it has made a difference in their lives.

Lynne Brebm
Lincoln, Nebraska

In October 2011, Sylvia came to hear information at Educare of Omaha about Save the Children's Early Steps to School Success program with her father and three children, ages 4, 3 and 1. She was currently working to make ends meet as a bilingual receptionist. She was married, but her husband had been deported months earlier. She was struggling with postpartum depression, chronic pain, and difficulties with discipline with her older children. She lives with her parents, her sister and her husband and their two children. After beginning home visits, Sylvia opened up about the ways she felt she struggled as a mother and worked with her home visitor to find solutions for potty training, kindergarten readiness, phobias, and much more. She became an active participant in the parent/child groups and established a daily routine of reading before bed. Since then, Sylvia's husband has been able to return to the United States, allowing her to stay home with her children. She has worked on learning projects like a daily schedule and a healthy recipe cookbook with her home visitor. Her children love reading, and she loves watching them learn and grow. After absorbing information on child development in the home visits, Sylvia is now aspiring to go back to school in the fall for early childhood education to become a teacher.

Danielle Bettmann
Omaha, Nebraska

One of the families that every staff member at Educare Lincoln knows is Rosa. Rosa is a single mother of 3 boys - then aged 1, 2 and 4. When she first came in to fill out an application for her boys the room was a hectic blur of blocks, tears, and forms. She had recently relocated to Lincoln after enduring years of abuse. She moved into her brother's 2 bedroom apartment where Rosa and all 3 boys shared a bed. At home and in childcare settings her boys, having experienced abuse, needed a lot of classroom support. So did Mom. She was homeless, without transportation, and in need of believing that she and her boys were safe. Her family's crisis situation also meant that physical and mental health were on the backburner. Andres, 2, had such severe tooth decay from his baby bottle his teeth were chipped to points. The boys' nutrition and environment did not allow for healthy immune systems to develop, so at least 1 child had a fever and an infection each week. Rosa could not keep a job because she constantly had to stay home with her sick children. After enrolling in Educare Rosa found work at a call center as a bilingual Customer Service Representative. On Saturdays Rosa had to work, so she took the boys to a local daycare facility. Each Saturday evening when Rosa picked the boys up she was met with a report about how chaotic her sons had made the day. Rosa became determined to find a job that did not require weekend hours and that could support her boys' social-emotional needs. Over a year later, Rosa is now employed full-time and receiving praise from her Supervisor. She confides to her Family Engagement Specialist that she knows she is able to finish college and wants that for her family. She no longer works on weekends and spends lots of quality time with her active, healthy sons. The reports that Mom receives daily from Educare are about how well Andres shared, that Julio can write his name, and that 2 year-old Paulo now has a favorite book. The special attention this family received from the Educare staff boosted Rosa's self-esteem and capacity to let herself love her boys to the full capacity of her huge heart.

Julia Dadds
Nebraska

Nevada

A student started last fall who hardly spoke English. He will graduate this summer with a rich expressive vocabulary, knowing all his letters and letter sounds, and able to count to fifty. He sounds out words on his own, and points out shapes like rhombuses around the classroom. Mom says he continues to learn “more and more every day.” Mom works as a chef, and volunteered frequently in our classroom, once giving a presentation about her job. I am blessed to work with families as caring and attentive as this student’s.

Katie Petrik
Nevada

Hi, my name is Miriam Hernandez. I have two daughters. Melanie is my first, she will be four years old next month and my second daughter, Meghan is 28 months old. The reason for this letter is to let you know that the school, Family to Family Connection, helps my daughters and me a lot. They learn, along with the other children, to share and work well with other kids at the school. I teach these lessons at home but it’s not the same.

At Family to Family, the teachers are so professional with the kids and with the parents. They are very patient with the kids. Both the children and the parents are learning a lot of skills thanks to the professional teachers. The most I like about the school is the teachers. They teach English, Spanish, and sign language; which is excellent for everybody, especially because English is my second language. There is a Language Strategies class that teaches expressive and receptive language and that helps a lot for our kids too.

I want to say thank you to the director and her team; they are the best. I am sure I made the best decision to choose this school.

Miriam Hernandez
Las Vegas, Nevada

I have a 2-year-old son and a 4-year-old daughter. I LOVE the pre-school I send my children to, however it is super expensive. As a teacher, I can barely afford to send them 2 mornings a week (\$124.00/wk). I need to work full time so I convinced my mother to watch them the rest of the time and I clean her house weekly in trade. In this economy, we do what we have to. If I had to pay for full time care, I would be spending \$1,500.00 a month- 3/4 of my take home pay.

Janelle Maddox
Reno, Nevada

A year and a half ago, our developmental specialist with Nevada Early Intervention recommended Family to Family for our premature twin boys. What initially attracted us to the program was the affordability and the classes offered.

Since attending Family to Family, our boys’ fine and gross motor skills, attention span, social skills, and vocabulary have greatly improved. We have seen a drastic improvement in their development. They are age appropriate in reference to their overall development.

We are grateful to all of the staff at Family to Family for their dedication and attention to our boys and all of the children. The structure and diversity that Family to Family provided us has been instrumental in preparing our boys for preschool. Without their services, we would have had a very difficult time reaching these goals.

Peter and Megan Durazo
Las Vegas, Nevada

The services that my family receives through the Family to Family organization have truly enriched my children’s development through creating a classroom type environment where they learn and play with others their age. The staff is professional and makes

every attempt to provide services for as many children as they can reasonably accommodate. They also provide classes for parents which I feel are a great resource for parents on topics such as discipline and the different stages of development.

I became personally involved with Family to Family with daughter Aviva through a referral from her speech therapist. Specifically, by two years old Aviva was still not talking and only communicated through sign language. Additionally, Aviva has had behavioral issues which stem from her inability to communicate effectively. Through her participation with the program Aviva has learned essential skills which will ensure for her continued success as she approaches preschool age such as sharing, waiting her turn, working with others and empathy.

Aviva's communication has also improved remarkably, when I take her to the activities at Family to Family I notice that Aviva attempts to use her words more often. The group activities are so beneficial because the speech therapist works with Aviva at the play groups.

Rebecca Fung
Las Vegas, Nevada

New Hampshire

As a grandmother and step-grandmother of twenty-one children from eleven families, I can tell you that appropriate day care is already expensive and difficult to find. In the current economy it is necessary for even well educated and well employed parents both to be working. If one should lose a job, benefits, mortgage payments, etc. are jeopardized and another family falls into poverty with all the negative impacts that creates. The data show that such situations result in long term damage to the health and welfare of parents and children alike unless the young children can be properly nurtured in a suitable day care setting. It is the only safety net left for too many families already. Do NOT pull it out from under them in this period of economic instability.

Alice Baldwin
Lancaster, New Hampshire

I am a single mother of a 12 year old son. I work in the health care setting so in addition to needing after school, summer, holiday and school break help, I work every other weekend at a hospital and require weekend help as well. My son has been through a wide array of child care options. Nannys, sitters, after school programs, friends and family. On average I spend \$350 to \$500 per month on childcare. My childcare choices are very unpredictable and rarely remain consistent. As my son gets older his needs are changing. Instead of childcare, he needs more of a mentor who can provide companionship, and support, who can get him to after school sports and activities and remain a constant in his life. My experience with childcare continues to be a challenge. There are simply not enough options, and rarely have I found anything that is creative, nurturing, and quality one on one environments for my son. The cost of childcare is also a challenge and is a large part of my budget. In a country that spends billions on their sports icons, I am baffled by the fact there really isn't much available to support the child of a working parent or parents.

Janet Dunlap
Peterborough, New Hampshire

As a mental Health counselor with over 30 years' experience, I see the positive impact in early screening and working with young children and their parents. Attachment relationships can be improved and dysregulation can be decreased!

Erika Bacon
Lebanon, New Hampshire

New Jersey

In my early years as a private preschool director, my heart would sink every time I lost an outstanding teacher because she could not live on poverty wages. Now that I am a state early childhood specialist who oversees public preschool for three and four year olds in New Jersey school districts, I am proud to say that not only are teachers paid comparable wages to K-12 teachers, but teachers can also advance to master teacher or administrative positions if they have the appropriate credentials. Our data is showing that children in this state are the true beneficiaries of a high quality early childhood education!

I have worked in the early childhood field for 33 years and have seen first-hand how quality programs benefit children. The first 20 years of my career was spent in our family owned center in a small West Texas Community. Higher education was not available to us locally at that time, so my mom and I traveled 90 miles, two times each week to attend classes at a Community College located in a larger city. We still had the responsibility of the day to day operations of our center so we worked during the day and then attended evening classes. We did this for 7 years. Because we went to school and learned how to care for and teach children in development appropriate ways our center was a quality one. This impacted hundreds of children in our community for many years. Many of these children have grown up and are successful adults. I believe this is a direct result of the quality education they received so many years ago. I currently work for a community college. My duties include coordinating an Intergenerational Childcare Program located at a local retirement village. I also am an instructor and teach several classes to adult students who are working on their certificates and degrees. I believe the only way to achieve quality care for children, is to educate the population that is teaching these children. We owe this to our children.

Rosanne Hansel
New Jersey

I have worked in the early childhood field for 33 years and have seen first-hand how quality programs benefit children.

I've seen the difference that a high quality early learning program has made for my daughter. We are fortunate that we were able to send her to a highly regarded child care program, and then to the pre-school in the same program. Her transition to kindergarten was relatively seamless. She had been introduced to the alphabet, but most importantly, she was comfortable in a group setting, and socially and emotionally was able to participate in her classes, make friends, follow instructions, and learn. She is now an avid reader entering the 3rd grade. I firmly believe that the high quality education she received helped set the stage for a lifelong love of learning. I myself went through the Head Start program many years ago. I believe it also helped set the stage for my own academic success. I can't say enough about how important high quality early learning programs are for our children, and for the future of our nation. ALL children should have equal access to a high quality program.

Maritza Guzman
New Jersey

I am a Music Teacher in a Pre-School program in North Bergen, NJ. This job has filled my heart with so much joy for 7 years. I see how much my students grow from September to June. I see their LOVE for learning, expand each and every day. I know that this early foundation in education is so important and fundamental. I love my job because of the children and how much it means to them.

Leslie Bruce Correa
Union City, NJ

Our young people reveal a lot about themselves. Who mommy is dating, what the family is doing in the home, things they see. We need to listen to the signs that a lot of time they are asking for big people to listen to them. We have to learn that little people have a lot to say. We must learn to be more understanding for the way they try to tell us, what is happening to them or not happening. Have a day when parents/guardians walk in the life of their children just one day out of the school year. Eat the food they eat and play the games they play. Life's not always easy. So let's be the glue that holds everything together while the young people are on our watch.

Sheila Freeman
New Jersey

Without the child care subsidy I have now I would not be able to work a steady job. I am able to work at a job that provides enough for me to pay my rent, utilities, etc. without any public assistance. Unfortunately though, I am in the bracket where I make too much money for any assistance programs but not enough to be able to afford the high cost of child care without help. Many of us in this bracket have high co-payments but we are able to survive. Consideration should be taken for taxpayers like myself who do not want or need food stamps, TANF or housing subsidies. There are many more who make a few dollars too much a year and are not as fortunate as I to still qualify for a child care subsidy. I believe the FPI should be raised to include more struggling, tax paying, families and possibly have cost of housing considered when determining co-payments and eligibility.

Lena Toledo
Clemonten, New Jersey

We need more quality preschools. My two children attended preschool. It was such a wonderful experience for us parents when we heard our children counting, 1,2,3, with their fingers sticking up, jumping and singing "no more monkeys jumping on the bed," saying out-loud "it's red, purple, orange, telling us "Mom, Dad, Santa Claus is real! I touched his beard, he came to the school and gave me toys," and so many, many more funny (by then) things they used to do when came home from the preschool. They were learning in all the ways. Oh, how I missed those times; my children are adults now, graduated from Montclair State University, and they also believe in preschool, and I would like my grandchildren to attend the preschool. Of course more preschools are needed! Preschools is a need -parents have to work.

Waldina Jimenez
Paterson, New Jersey

Child care has had an enormous impact on my life. As a mom with two children seven years apart, my own experience was dramatically different with each child. The first had the luxury of a grandmother young enough to care for her while mom worked. Seven years later my mother was too old and frail to care for my son. However, again I was lucky, I was able to find a job as an administrator in the after school field, so my own child was in high quality care and it was free to me. The need for good care led me to a satisfying and fulfilling career, and a determination to see that ALL children and families had access to excellent child care. However, 24 years later, and still in the field, I realize how expensive and difficult high quality child care is to provide. I also realize how underpaid the people who dedicate themselves to caring for other people's children are! That same son who was lucky enough to

**It was such a wonderful experience for us parents when we heard our children
counting, 1,2,3, with their fingers sticking up, jumping and singing
"no more monkeys jumping on the bed."**



be in good care is now working as a child care provider himself. He is bright, has a college degree, and he does a great job, but is grossly underpaid, and has no health insurance. The daughter whose grandmother gave her such loving care also grew up to be a bright and successful young woman, but works long hours and can't rely on her mother to provide the same at home care she enjoyed. She has two young children in child care, and pays more than her mortgage payment each month to keep them in a good program! If we are to continue to provide our children with safe, high quality, enriching child care, it cannot be on the backs of underpaid providers or be so cost prohibitive that parents cannot afford it. The cost of subsidizing child care is far less than what we will pay for future remediation or incarceration if we fail to give children and families what they need in the early years.

Denise Sellers
Stratford, New Jersey

I am the Executive Director of a state funded preschool, better known as the former "Abbott" program. For the past 12 years, I have been working with an at-risk population, providing families with quality early childhood education and child rearing support.

Most of the children enter the program with challenges. They do not know how to hold a book, have limited language skills, and have narrow experiences in group activities. Families are awestruck when they learn that reading with their children is critical to support literacy skill development. The families' knowledge of nutritional requirements for their young children's educational achievements is virtually non-existent.

At the end of the first year of the three-year-old quality preschool experience, families are using the lending library daily, children are interacting positively in group activities, and cognitive growth is discernible. It is not uncommon to overhear children explain to their parents that they learned about trapezoids or describe the metamorphosis of a butterfly. The children not

only write their names, but also "read" stories to their families actually pointing to the words as they emulate the reading experience.

Anecdotally, teachers of kindergarten celebrate the preparedness of the children entering their classrooms who have had the quality preschool experience. The children are self-directed and demonstrate an enthusiasm for learning. Empirically, data reveal that the quality preschool experience produces a population of children who excel on standardized tests in grades 3 and 4. The quality preschool program has proven to reduce the frequency of grade retention and special services. Annually, about 15% of the children in my program receive intervention to remediate such concerns as speech, behavior, autism spectrum disorders, and so on. These interventions actually result in reduced costly services as the children progressed in school.

The nutritional guidance that families receive to promote good health and physical activity has long-term benefits for all family members. Children who begin school with sodas and chips for breakfast soon request healthy cereals and milk; visits to the park with families increases as physical activity supersedes television and video games.

It is clear that quality preschool benefits young children and their families. It benefits the economy, global competition of human capital, and social support programs, as studies have revealed. The United States must provide quality preschool to a larger mass of young children to ensure economic growth and national security. The program works, and our country is worth this investment.

Dr. Lorraine Cooke
Elizabeth, New Jersey

I am the father of three young children who have experienced the high quality state-funded preschool program at Egenolf Early Childhood Center in Eliza-

beth, NJ. Having had this experience, and observing the difference it has made in my children's academic success has made me a strong advocate for preschool as a component of the public school continuum of education. A system for Preschool through twelfth grade in the public school system would help to advance the US in global competition and economic stability.

It seems that education in America is on a downward spiral. In order for America to again lead in education, we must build a strong educational foundation. This goal can be obtained by supporting our pre-school programs. Research shows that providing a high quality education for children under the age of five yields significant long-term benefits.

As a parent I understand the importance of preschool programs. I have three children, each of whom experienced the benefits of the High Scope curriculum in their pre-schools. In the High Scope Perry Preschool study, it was proven that children who attend high-quality preschool are more likely to graduate from high school, own a home, are more family oriented, and have higher earning potential as positive productive citizens when they become adults. My children are not adults yet, however they are all more advanced in all of their subjects and are more socially oriented compared to those who didn't go to preschool.

As a preschool educator, I have helped many children acquire language and cognitive learning as well as fundamental skills that will help determine their success in life. These skills include problem solving, cooperation, creativity, curiosity, persistence, and decision-making. During the school year, it is amazing to see the progress of a young child in a high quality preschool program. I'm happy to be a part of it. The benefits to me, as a parent of a preschooler in a high quality program, have enriched my skills as a father in how I raise my own children.

It is imperative that the US government officials work together to make the best decision for the future of our country. Early childhood education is one of the best investments our country can make.

Jevon Dunmore
New Jersey



New Mexico

Last year, a four year old Anya entered pre-k with Spanish as her only oral language. By December she was speaking some English and understood more English than when she began the school year. Anya began learning her alphabet, numbers and names of shapes and colors. She had been very shy at the beginning of the year and now was participating in all the activities and making friends. By the end of the year, Anya could name all the letters of the alphabet, colors, shapes, numbers to 10, and count to 30 fluently in English. Her conversation skills had grown beyond expectations and she was learning to solve addition and subtraction problems. With the engagement and exploration of Pre-K, Anya had grown exponentially in cognitively, socio-emotional, physically and behavioral. She was ready for Kindergarten and beyond.

Hope Smith
New Mexico

I have been teaching/coordinating Special Education services for 3-5 year olds for the past ten years. The children I work with are from a rural, low socio-economic area of New Mexico and also a Navajo Reservation. I have witnessed how beneficial it is for these children and their parents to be introduced to school at a young age. Early Childhood programs give children a chance to develop socialization, communication, motor and basic academic skills that they would otherwise not be exposed to. Science tells us that the brains of children between the ages of 3 and 5 are at their most active stage for developing connections and language. Therefore it is vital to their academic future (and closing the achievement gap) to immerse these children in the type of language and communication rich environment that can be found in quality early childhood programs. I have seen this growth in the children I've worked with over the years. They start Kindergarten ready to learn, and therefore have a much better chance at continued success in school.

Sonja Stalnaker
Magdalena, New Mexico

What do I see in my pre-k room? I see children learning to problem solve with others and resolving issues in positive ways once they are given the strategies. I see children who both want specific blocks in the block area stopping and having a dialogue about what they each want to do and how many blocks they will need. Often, I see the work change so they work together toward a shared vision. I hear from families that their children are using words to resolve conflict with siblings instead of hands and feet. I see joy when children become independent and learn to do things on their own. I see love and care in action every day. I see children who decide what they want to learn and truly work to accomplish their goals. I see children striving to be their best and help others.

Lynette Perlikiewicz
New Mexico

I have spent my entire career working with young children and their families as both a teacher and director of ECE programs. I want Congress to understand that children who come to school without the benefit of early learning opportunities come ill-prepared for the academic and social requirements of today's early elementary schools. As a teacher I noted GREAT differences between students who had early learning experiences and those who didn't. Children with early experiences understood how to work as part of a group, and they had greater emotional maturity and a strong cognitive foundation to build new concepts upon. They were not easily frustrated by new concepts or by problems - they were challenged. The example I use with parents is to think of two people who want to become chefs. One learned to cook at an early age, learning about different foods and various preparations, tasting and serving. Gradually he had access to sharper tools and chances to do more cooking. Later he took classes in high school and worked as a dishwasher and fast food cook before applying to culinary school. The other child grew up without ANY of these experiences, NEVER actually cooked, and

rarely assisted in food preparation of any kind. He could name foods, but couldn't describe how they tasted or how they could be prepared. Which of these two candidates is likely to be more successful in culinary school? Children with early learning experiences are like the first chef. They have been given the foundational experiences for success. Of course, children without such experiences can and DO catch up, but they struggle and they have to put time and energy into learning things that have become second nature to other children. Parents who don't see the importance of early learning often spend time "teaching" children rote memorization skills (like counting or the ABC's) instead of allowing children to discover new concepts in rich learning environments designed to promote thinking and problem solving. Their children come to school with the ability to recite the ABC's but without an understanding of the sounds or shapes of letters, an appreciation for stories or the concepts of print. So they struggle to catch up, taking joy out of their school experience and often end up disliking school which then directly impacts their success. Investment in quality programs designed for young children is an investment that will pay off in a healthy, educated, capable society.

Mary Hampton
Las Cruces, New Mexico

Finding good childcare was a frustrating experience. The university where I work has a fantastic childcare program, but the waiting list for infants less than 1 year old is more than 2 years - we would have had to pay to be on the waiting list for over a year before even trying to get pregnant! So we went to the private sector and found a nice place very near my office. We got on the waiting list, but after my son was born and my wife had to return to work the director informed us that there was no room in their infant class. After a frantic search (and some unpaid time off work), we eventually found a place that we very much like. We wouldn't trade it, but my wife and I (both working professionals with advanced degrees) now pay nearly 1/4 of our total take-home pay for care for our son. And the cost of the program is in line with others around the city, it isn't some kind of 'Cadillac Care'. I don't know how families who make less than we do can possibly afford childcare. We hope to have a second child, but simply can't afford it.

F. Scott Worman
Albuquerque, New Mexico



New York

For three weeks, Amanda supported her team of Jumpstart Corps members to implement the Jumpstart program in an early childhood classroom in Brooklyn. Emmanuel, a three year old had yet to say a word to any of the adults and children in the classroom. For six sessions, Amanda hoped that, that day would be the day she would hear his young voice. At the sixth session, Amanda was walking away from Emmanuel's group when she heard a very eager high-pitched voice squeal "E." It took Amanda a minute to realize that Emmanuel had just uttered his first word in the presence of her Jumpstart team, and perhaps one of his first words in that classroom, and it was during one of our very own activities: Welcome. Emmanuel continued to talk throughout Welcome and Reading, pointing out parts in Noisy Nora and shouting out comments. Although Emmanuel went back to his quiet self during circle time, Amanda could not help but to feel an abundant amount of pride in the fact that she was a part of something that helped this child to feel comfortable enough to share his voice with us. High quality early childhood programming, like Jumpstart, allows young children to grow not just their cognitive skills but also to develop who they are as people. Giving young children a voice to express their ideas, feelings and dreams is something that cannot be undervalued as we think about the future of this country.

Amanda Mercado Brooklyn, New York

I have had the opportunity of teaching preschoolers for 5 years and directing early care and learning programs for 30 years. I currently work for an agency that has grant funding to help working families pay for child care. I have been able to witness the positive effects of quality care for young children. I spent most of my career working in inner city programs where we often saw preschoolers come to day care already needing remediation. These young children blossomed in the child care program. They left the program ready for kindergarten and ready for lifelong learning oppor-

tunities. I worked at one center long enough to have parents call me when their children graduated from high school to tell me what college that their child was going to attend. The last child care program that I directed was at a community college and each year I saw students that I had known from my years in the inner city child care programs. For many of these students, they were the first in their families to attend college. Quality child care not only assists the child but allows parents to work or attend college knowing that their child was learning and receiving the care that they needed to succeed in school and in life. Unfortunately, I have also witnessed what happens to families and children when subsidies are not available to assist families with the cost of care. Last December 200 families lost their child care subsidy in Schenectady County due to lack of funding. Parents had to make difficult decisions about the care of their children. Some parents went into debt to try to keep their children in quality child care. Some parents took their children out of programs and patched together care that was often not dependable. Some parents ended up losing their jobs. The stress that this has created has been destructive to families and children.

Betty Bellino Troy, New York

I began teaching special education middle school students in 2002. I inquired as to whether my students had the benefit of Early Intervention or early education. When I could not get the answer from colleagues, I did the math. Since most of my students at the time were born in the mid 1980's and EI began in 1996, I quickly realized that my students did not receive the service which accounted for some of their severe behavioral and educational deficits. As the years passed, students were entering my class on a much higher level and it was then that I realized the benefit of EI as they had all received the service.

Charlayne Williams Brooklyn, New York

My son's preschool experience was awesome. We were in a program that was so individualized and differentiated, that he was given a lot of attention that boosted his confidence with academics and social relationships. My wife and I are totally convinced that his strong positive experience in preschool built a solid foundation for him in elementary school. His reading, math and critical thinking skills are far above grade level.

Paul Cole
Plattsburgh, New York

For two years in early childhood special ed, I taught a bright quadriplegic girl named Amanda who could only communicate by nodding her head and had limited control of one hand. However, I knew there was nothing wrong with her mind so I fought to have mainstreamed into general ed and receive assistive technology. Years later I met her mother who told me she had received her Regents high school diploma with honors and was going on to college.

Amy Kopchains
Flushing, New York

My two children had vastly different experiences of child care. My older son went to a regular day care overseen by one woman in her home with children ranging from 2 months to elementary school wrap-around. My younger son went to a prominent child care center that catered to children at their readiness level and focused on the importance of early learning. The younger child has been in honors classes, on the honor roll, won several academic awards, participated in clubs and sports, and is an accomplished musician for his age. His older sibling lost the opportunity during those formative years to surge ahead due to the early learning environment he was exposed to.

Susan Lafond
Watervliet, New York

I recall a time as a parent volunteer in the Pre-K program working with a small boy who always acted out. Being in a Pre-kgn class helped this small boy become more social by being around other children. The teacher challenged his behavior and he was able to blossom into a very caring, young man. He went from class clown to class leader, being helpful to others. Pre-K is where it all begins.

Jeanette Lawson
Bronx, New York

Early child care helped my friend implement a preventive course of action for her son. He had a form of autism which affected his speech and communication skills. Since she had services available he is now part of the honor classes in his school. His speech has been corrected and he interacts with his peers much better. Without these early interventions he may have been labeled and cocooned into himself.

Tiffany Mack
Bronx, New York

I volunteered in a Pre-K classroom for a few years before I became a classroom teacher. When I became a classroom teacher, I actually had a few of the students I worked with in the pre-k classroom. Many of these students have benefitted in a variety of ways through the availability of a pre-k program in place. These students have early interventions in place as well as a great amount of social skills in place before they reach kindergarten.

BethAnn O'Neil
Plattsburgh, New York

A family I volunteer with received early intervention speech services for their 2 year-old daughter. These services were provided in the home so that the busy mother of three did not have to take her daughter



anywhere. As a result of these services, their daughter has made great progress and is now speaking!

Stephanie Storey
Astoria, New York

At the beginning of my fourth year teaching Universal Pre-Kindergarten at Public School 198, East Flatbush, Brooklyn, New York, one of the second grade teachers asked me, "Karen, is this the first year that I am getting your students?" I answered, "Let's figure it out." We counted the years together and laughed, "yes," in unison. I then asked, "Why are you asking?" She answered, "I can pick your students out in a minute. They are organized, alert, focused. I can look at my line and know who was in your class. I can look in their desks and know who was in your class. Your students are confident, self-motivated, unbelievably organized. I look forward to many more years of getting your students. Thank you." Three other comments I received were from two kindergarten teachers and a parent. One teacher said in a kidding manner, "Please leave something for me to teach!" and the other teacher said, "It's great that your students come to me knowing so much but most of all they are kind to each other. What do you do to teach that?" The parent, on the first afternoon that she volunteered in my classroom told me upon leaving, "Mrs. Berliner, I cannot believe what the students do in a two and a half hour class. It's amazing how much they are learning!"

Karen Berliner
New York

My godson was evaluated at an early age and qualified for speech and language services at home and in a center based setting. He then went on to preschool receiving the services but was progressing well. Upon reaching first grade in the public school he was placed in a special education setting. The teacher would often catch him reading books in the corner. She soon approached his mother and said, "He can't be here,

he can read books already." He was then decertified and later placed in a Gifted and Talented program. Thanks to Early Intervention and mom's weekly trips to the library he is now in an excellent all boys' school located in Jamaica, Queens New York.

Gretta Belton-Bourjolly
Jamaica, New York

In our society, where it's become imperative for both parents to work just to cover the costs of necessities, children need a safe, healthy, and nurturing environment during the day. When I worked as an assistant in a nursery school, I was amazed at how much the three and four year olds were able to learn through daily activities. (Within a few months, most of the children recognized all their names in writing because of the use of name posters. We have seen that children who start their formal education with a strong background will have less difficulty learning.

Kelly Doris
Hyde Park, New York

Personally, as an English Language Learner I cried every day to Kindergarten because I did not know the language. It was truly a "sink or swim" environment. I felt miserable and invisible and wondered whether there was anything terribly wrong with me!! A comprehensive early childhood program meeting the needs of ALL students is absolutely key. A supportive and inclusive environment would have made a huge difference in my self-concept.

Margarita Suero-Duran
New York, New York

I went to a pre-K and kindergarten (in the early 1970s) where we (the students) learned sign language, English and Portuguese. Some children were American born, some were Portuguese, some were Portuguese-

American and some were hearing impaired. Being exposed to varied modalities of communication enforced a love of language within me. Today I am an English and ESL teacher!

Jocelyn Brathwaite
Bayside, New York

I have not been a teacher in an early care and education classroom for about 10 years now. I am now a teacher of teachers; a trainer, consultant, and mentor. I work with people from all modalities of care, center based programs, family childcare, nursery schools, etc. and the one common thread I find is that everyone values what they do, and they want to be the best at providing quality care and education for young children. I am fortunate to work with people who strive to be the best, whether they are almost there or have a long, long way to go. I work with people who truly want to make a difference. My greatest pleasure is when I visit the classrooms of the people who attend my Child Development Associate classes. They spend 120 hours with me learning about quality care, child development, health, safety, etc. When I visit I get to see them in action, putting what they learned into practice. They are so proud and so am I. It's such a wonderful feeling to watch these people give of themselves and to watch the children develop, learn, and grow and most importantly have a good time doing it. I thought that when I left the classroom I would not be making as much of an impact on the future but how wrong I was. Now I am reaching more children and families than ever by working with their teachers.

Camille Lachar-Lofaro
New York

I did not have the chance to attend such programs but would have benefitted from such programs being a former English Language Learner. Students whose parents were unable to read to them because they had two jobs are at more of a disadvantage than their

counterparts whose parents have the opportunity to read a book to them and immerse them in a language rich environment. I had to play "catch-up" when I attended 1st grade but still was unable to make the necessary gains to pass to second grade. I firmly believe if my mother would have had the opportunity to put me in such programs she would have done so. By no means does technology and television take place of a teacher either. Please take into consideration my story and the story of others in implementing more Early Childhood Education for ALL kids. If you do not believe me....look at the data it matters!

Mabel Grullon
Sleepy Hollow, New York

It is always amazing to teach a child how to form the letters of the alphabet and the numbers one to ten. At our school we use the "Handwriting Without Tears" program to be consistent with the language for the spatial direction of the lines. Many of our children struggle with so much academics forced upon them before they are able to figure out their own visual perception abilities. When you can take a step back and then go to the basics and build the foundations first the student can make their gains visibly and self-rewarding to success. I am proud of each and every K-student that has been moved up from this program because they were able to form the letters than the words and then the sentences needed for their school assignments. It is much better to teach than to frustrate the child before they are ready.

Leslie McDonnell
New York, New York

My nephew, who has been enrolled in a high quality child care, has been able to learn new things and his levels of knowledge have increased leaps and bounds. Fortunately, he has been able to participate in this type of program.

Louis Morris
New York, New York



Working with students in kindergarten we encounter both kinds of children; students who have preschool experiences and students who don't. The students who don't have a harder time adjusting to school norms and procedures. They struggle with obeying rules like sitting down, standing on line, active listening, and many other things that are crucial to the learning of a young child attending a public school. Teachers often lose a lot of instructional time training these students who lack prior school experience.

Daniel Singleton
Staten Island, New York

I will always remember when I was an assistant and was in a classroom with pre-k, I couldn't believe the little faces I had to assist. I felt so elated to know that everything that was taught to these children was impacted in later years when I saw them again. They remembered my name and how I gave them too much homework. I was proud that they were ready to attack Kindergarten without a problem. It's a great feeling to know I impacted their lives.

Candace LeDoux
Brooklyn, New York

English was not my first language though I was born in the U.S. In short, I learned English in school. I really appreciate the time and energy given by my pre-K teachers in order for me to eventually graduate years later from UCLA with an English degree.

Farheen Malik
Brooklyn, New York

I am writing as a parent whose 3 year old son was not yet speaking. After ruling out a hearing problem he started receiving individual speech and language therapy with limited results. It wasn't until he enrolled as a four year old in a high quality, intensely

language focused Pre-K program that he began to make incredible progress. Despite leaving off the beginning consonants of many words once he finally began to speak, he graduated from that Pre-K class to enroll in regular kindergarten in my local public school. He continued to receive speech and language services through 2nd grade and went on to perform on stage in his later school years. I am convinced that immersing him in a full day, high quality, and language based Pre-K program made all the difference in his development and readiness for school.

Karen Horowitz
Oceanside, New York

I am a speech therapist and I have found that students who were enrolled in pre-K performed better than those who did not attend pre-K. For example, those students were able to identify sounds and letters; which are precursors to reading readiness and becoming a great reader and writer.

Ava Geddis
Queens Village, New York

When I was in Kindergarten, the teacher asked each student in my class what they wanted to be when they grew up. Most said doctor, lawyer, taxi driver or clown. I was the sole child who said teacher. I decided to be a teacher in Kindergarten because of the wonderful Early Childhood Educators I had. I realized at a very early age the impact that teachers had on the lives of the children that they impacted. I now teach Kindergarten so that I can have the same impact on children every day.

Sierra Jorgensen
New York, New York

In the mid 1970's, my wife and I moved into our first home in a small town in upstate NY. Diane was start-

ing her first job as a teacher, and I was unemployed, looking for work as an auto mechanic and thinking about going back to school. Our daughter Alicia, 2 ½, was excited to be in a new place with lots of outdoor play, and I was glad to be a “househusband”, noticing daily delights in her new words and abilities. She was patient with me as I fixed up the house while Diane worked.

But she had no kids her age to play with, we had no local family, and child care was spotty – mostly through individual day care homes or very meager programs that called themselves “nursery schools” but had poor nutrition, no teacher training and questionable reliability. So when we found out that an old family friend, Ruth Nevin, was director of a Head Start and pre-kindergarten program in nearby Fish’s Eddy NY, we checked it out. We found out that if I volunteered, I could bring Alicia, who could make some friends, and the center would get money from the Federal government.

We went twice a week for several months, with great results. Alicia learned to serve her own healthy food, play cooperatively, follow group norms and directions, and appreciate the leadership of trained early childhood professionals who had also been local Head Start parents. I admired the empowering progress made by these parents, their loyalty to Ruth and their commitment to the safe, healthy development of their little town’s children. We enjoyed field trips, outdoor play time and the comforting daily routine there.

Though we eventually moved back to Syracuse, where Alicia grew up and went to public school, we have fond memories of the wonderful environment we shared in that little Head Start center. Alicia would play “school” with her younger brother and other friends, often playing the role of teacher. She did well in her studies. She went to Oberlin College, then to Cornell University where she got a Ph.D. in development sociology. She’s now a tenured professor of public sociology at Ithaca College. She enjoys supporting students to do community internships in addition to classroom

teaching about poverty and social change. She and her husband, Tim Shenk, are involved with a network of organizations working to end poverty, the Poverty Initiative and University of the Poor, and work with the Committee on US-Latin American Relations at Cornell.

I developed too: After a few more years as an auto mechanic, I got two masters degrees and am now a social worker in family mental health. I appreciate the work of CDF, both in supporting the “early start/ healthy start/safe start” of Head Start type programs and in fighting to end child poverty. My experience as a parent is one I often draw upon in bringing hope to parents of kids with emotional and behavioral concerns.

Peter E. Swords
Syracuse, New York

I share this story as a parent whose child went through an inclusive Pre-Kindergarten program alongside children with special needs. Nearly 20 years ago I was looking for a quality early childhood program for my young daughter Megan, as she was nearing kindergarten age. I enrolled her in Stepping Stones Learning Center, a fully inclusive early childhood program in Rochester New York that served children with and without special needs in a unique environment where they could learn and grow together and from each other. My daughter was quite shy and was not a very big fan of going to school and rarely spoke of her day there. Until one day she came home and said “daddy, I made a friend.” This was a very big deal for us as she hardly spoke of her experiences at school. Her conversation continued; “her name is Susie and she talks with her hands!” Susie was a young girl in her class with Down Syndrome, who was also hard of hearing and used sign language to communicate. My daughter immediately showed me the sign for tree; “look Daddy, this means tree”. I was taken aback at her story, largely because I remember how when I was young, a child-like Susie with Down Syndrome was treated very different from me. I was taken

aback because my daughter seemingly did not even notice that Susie had a disability. She didn't notice or didn't care that she had hearing aids and was hard of hearing. She only saw her skill of signing and was genuinely jealous that her new friend could "talk with her hands". This unique program created an environment where all children could learn, regardless of need. My daughter received a quality early childhood pre-kindergarten experience that prepared her for her school age years and beyond. She entered kindergarten prepared to meet all her challenges as a result. By participating in this inclusive program at Stepping Stones Learning Center, she gained a greater sense of sympathy, empathy, caring, understanding and patience because of her peers with special needs; what a lifelong gift. I am proud to say that this story does have a happy ending, as my daughter Megan graduated high school at the top of her class, alongside her classmate...Susie! Last summer Stepping Stones Learning Center actually hosted Susie as a teacher's assistant through a work study program that she participated in. I am sure that back then, my daughter and her friend Susie had no idea the influence they had on each other because of their time spent in this quality early childhood pre-kindergarten program. I was so impressed at this impact that 18 years ago, I applied and was hired as a teacher in the program, teaching for more than 9 years in the inclusive Pre-K classroom and have been part of the administration of Stepping Stones Learning Center ever since.

Don Sinton
New York

As an ex-kindergarten school teacher I could always tell on the first day of class who had nursery school and who didn't. They shared better, had better small motor skills, and were better prepared for academics. They also were less stressed about being away from their parents and used to being around many students.

Diana Torta
New York

My daughter, Zoey (which means "gift of life") was born at 28 weeks and weighed 2.9 pounds when she was born. She came home from the hospital at 6 weeks old weighing 4.9 pounds. At 3 months old, I referred her to Early Intervention. As an educator, I've always known that early intervention (EI) of any kind is the key to student success. My daughter is a prime example of this. My daughter received EI related services: occupational therapy, physical therapy, and speech therapy. She made so much progress with her therapists that she soon no longer needed the speech therapy! At age 3, she transitioned to Preschool Special Education and was enrolled in an integrated program with a terrific special education teacher. Again, she did so well that she no longer qualified for this program after a year. Since then, she has been enrolled in a Montessori program. This past June, the summer before her Kindergarten year, she was declassified! This was my goal for her, and with the help of the high quality early learning environments she was in and the early childhood professionals that worked with her, she was able to develop the critical skills she needed to become a successful student. She is one very smart, skilled, talented, full of life little girl. I urge you to consider supporting a strong start for children - it made all the difference with my child.

Mary Sapp
New York

I conduct regular sessions for infants, toddlers and their parents at a number of libraries on Long Island, New York. During one of these sessions, I spent time with a mom and her seven month old baby boy. At the first session, the mother was anxious about her baby's lack of movement and how little he was responding to her compared to her friend's baby who was the same age. I modeled for her various stimulating and bonding techniques that she began to use with her child. It was amazing how much the mother and infant accomplished after we worked together to help them bond. In their own way they both became aware of their love

for each other. By the third session after stimulating the baby by showing the mother ways in which to relate and play with her infant, her baby was doing all the things that her friend's baby was doing, including even more advanced developmental activities than her friend's infant. The mom said that I would be responsible if her son walked at the age of ten months which would be difficult for her to keep up with him. She was joking and at the same time grateful that we worked together to bring her son to the point where he was accomplishing a great deal.

Becker Nettie
Rockville Centre, New York

I am writing you, to inform you that being a licensed child care provider has been a rewarding experience for me and the children I care for. With the continuous guidance and learning education provided by the faculty at the Child Care Resource Network, I am proud to say that I have achieved so many goals that have exceeded my expectations. I currently provide childcare

to several children between the ages of 2-5, and have received positive feedback from their parents. I have been informed that the children I care for get excited each morning for coming over, my nick name is Ouma, and they continuously nag their parents about wanting to stay at my place. I was also informed that the children have learned several skills including, saying "please" and "thank you", cleaning up after playtime, and most importantly eating the right foods and taking the required naps needed for sufficient growth. There are several days a week, where we practice relaxation methods including yoga and tai chi, in addition, to high energy exercises including jumping jacks. Learning about the impact I have had on these wonderful children, has truly touched my heart, as I truly love providing child care, and enjoy engaging in several learning and reading activities in order to prepare them for the forthcoming years. Thank you once again, for allowing me to share my experiences with you, and for continuously seeking to make America the best country to live in!

Joumana Eldik
Williamsville, New York

As an ex-kindergarten school teacher I could always tell on the first day of class who had nursery school and who didn't. They shared better, had better small motor skills, and were better prepared for academics.



North Carolina

The Daycare Center at Michigan State University was a Joy Forever! It was a comfortable place for my children where they learned through carefully structured play environments. Although they were sometimes called into a circle for story hours or singing, they often could choose their activities: the dress up area, the one to one story area etc. If children wanted to fight over a toy, neither could have it. The ratio of adults to children met the federal standard of one to five, with graduates in Early Learning as Head teachers and interns from departments such as Psychology or Sociology as helpers. The children were from 26 different countries. (My son was sad one day because his friend from Taiwan was moving to "Cubeston, Texas.") At the end of the day, parents found sheets in our children's cubbies telling us what had been done that day and suggesting follow ups such as baking blueberry pie if they had read "Blueberries for Sal." The Daycare Center was not cheap; it was my biggest expense, though it was free for a parent who was receiving food stamps. I wish that all children could have an early childhood environment like that one! I count the fact that it was there for my children and me when we needed it as one of my greatest blessings!

Margaret Parish

Wilmington, North Carolina

I taught high school English to sophomore and junior students in a predominantly Hispanic school in South Texas. What students excelled? The students who came to my class with sophisticated language skills. These students either had parents who were quite verbal in English or Spanish, and who read to them, or the students had experienced a year or two of pre-school learning in a setting like Head Start. There is no mystery to this. Research and academic performance have affirmed, for years, the value.

Bruce Cox

Brevard, North Carolina

My husband and I were married young and had our children early in our marriage. We were trying to complete our undergraduate degrees, raise a family and hold down full time jobs. We did not make enough money to 'do it all.' We were received financial assistance for childcare. The governmental supplement helped us manage it all. Without it, we would not have our degrees, we would not have rewarding jobs and we could only imagine what would have become of our children had they not received quality childcare.

Anitra Green

Charlotte, North Carolina

As a recent PhD graduate, I've been looking for full-time work while struggling to manage an active 2 year old daughter. I am fortunate to have a grandmother nearby who watches my daughter twice a week. Without her, I would not be able to apply for jobs or keep up with the few contract jobs I do have. I currently pay an unemployed friend to watch my daughter twice a week in the morning, but I wish I could afford to pay for her to attend a quality childcare facility. I would love for her to be able to socialize with other children and learn with them. High quality childcare is simply too expensive for us to afford on our budget. Over one quarter of my husband's salary already goes to health insurance for myself and our daughter. Many childcare options in our city that are of decent quality cost about half of his salary. How can we afford that? We make too much money to be eligible for any sort of assistance with health care or childcare, and we struggle to determine how that is possible. I would love for congress to consider childcare assistance for middle class families.

Shelby Laird

Raleigh, North Carolina

"Brown bear brown bear what do you see?" I love to see the look on a child's face when they learn a new self-help skill. That's a priceless moment. Or when

I'm having a bad day, I look into those cute little faces for enjoyment. Working in childcare is not just for a paycheck, it is my passion.

Teacher
Belmont, North Carolina

I recall a time when I really felt like I was making a difference. It was once at a home visit. It was a new family - the baby was 5 months old. When I arrived at the home mom was apologizing for the untidiness of her home explaining why her singlewide trailer which houses a family of 7 wasn't immaculate. I assured her I wasn't the house detective and proceeded with our visit. As I plopped down in the living room floor I noticed a sort of surprised look on her face. I said is this okay as referring to where I sat- she smiled the biggest smile and said sure is and I like you already. I told her I like her too, and we began with the visit. She was right there actively participating and has been now for 18 months. She later shared with me at another visit that by me sitting down on her not perfectly cleaned floor that she knew I wasn't going to be judgmental as some other agencies are. As parent educators we have to gain that rapport with the families we serve and remember it's our service they are allowing not vice versa.

Carri Jump
North Carolina

Community School for People under Six in Carrboro has been a NC Pre-Kindergarten Site since 2002. When we think about a child who has been most successful in our NC Pre-K Program, we often think of "Daniel". Daniel came to our program 3 weeks before his 5th birthday and had never been in a group setting or child care program. The Learning Accomplishment Program-Revised (LAP-R) was administered to determine his developmental level. He was identified to be at the 2-year old age for fine motor, gross motor, social

emotional and self help skills. Also, his receptive language was delayed.

Daniel had difficulty sitting up without support in circle time or building with blocks; he would lay on the other children or on top of blocks. He had difficulty with separation from his mother, sharing, taking turns and interacting with his peers. He could not do daily routines such as dress himself, serve himself, toileting routines (such as washing hands, brushing teeth and even using the bathroom). He had no bowel control. Physically he could not run, hop, stand on one foot and had no balance. He cried daily when he listened to music because it made him sad.

Once we determined what his needs were, we were able to set goals to help strengthen his skills and development. We worked on strengthening his core and balance through physical activities daily. We provided activities to increase fine motor skills such as lacing, puzzles, cutting with scissors, holding a pencil and writing. We used the CSEFEL materials to support his social emotional growth within the classroom and other classroom strategies, such as modeling positive interactions with his peers to increase language and learning.

When he left the program 9 months later, he was able to do all the gross motor skills he could not do at arrival, such as run, hop, ride a bike, etc. He could write his name, cut with scissors, put puzzles together and dress himself (clothes and shoes). He enjoyed art which he never wanted to go to in the beginning. He could do his daily routines such as serving his food, pouring his milk and brushing his teeth. He was finally able to sit up by himself and build large structures in the block area. His language improved and his relationships with his peers were more positive. By the end of his year, he has established good friendships. After a month of listening to music, he began to enjoy both listening and dancing.

Beth Pierce
North Carolina



North Dakota

When students walk into my classroom I can tell if they have been exposed to Kindergarten curriculum. Unfortunately this is only done if the student has very involved parents or a day care provider that is providing lessons to students since our state does not have or fund early childhood education. More early intervention would mean less intervention needed in later educational years.

Heidi Budeau
Bismarck, North Dakota

Since starting at my school 5 years ago, my district has started a preschool program. I have seen great changes in the students as they move onto kindergarten; they are not as shy and are ready for school.

Jennifer Vetter
Dickinson, North Dakota

Our local university has a Head Start program that does wonders for the students. The program involves helping parents and students learn and grow in their education.

Jonathan Fugleberg
Portland, North Dakota

Early Childhood Education has been introduced in our school and everybody is benefiting! It gives our older students a chance to mentor and make a difference in the lives of younger students!

Erika Honeyman
Dickinson, North Dakota

My sons were involved in a pre-K program at our local university. The program provided the skills they would need to start school.

Galesburg, North Dakota

I work with preschool special needs students and they really benefit from all aspects of what we do with them. Many of them do not get what they need at home.

Lori Nelson
Portland, North Dakota

Ohio

Our school has an all-day preschool with a disabilities program. I have seen many, many students make phenomenal gains in fine motor skills, speech, and number and letter recognition to name a few. Without the preschool program, many parents have told us that they would never have hoped for their child to see such gains!

Linda Johnson
Cincinnati, Ohio

I believe in early childhood. My children all attended Head Start and boy did it give them a Headstart on life and education!!!! Hip hip hooray for early childhood education. My children are now grown and their children are attending Head Start and other early childhood education programs.

Dorothy Fair
Euclid, Ohio

At my daughter's day care the child care workers read to her every day, did math activities, puzzles, free play and countless other activities. My daughter was well prepared for kindergarten.

Dolores Samson
Toledo, Ohio

As a business leader, I see the value of an educated workforce, as a parent I have seen the difference early childhood education meant in my own children's life. It absolutely was the basis for their later success in life. And as a former Chairman of the Board of a local daycare/preschool with a sliding fee scale I saw the difference it made in the lives of children we served and their families. Please invest in America's future through these proven programs. It will be an investment in America's success that will pay dividends for generations to come.

Lisa Hillenbrand
Ohio

I teach sixth graders. By the time I get them, it is very easy to tell which students were supported in learning at early ages. Where children do not have a parent or relative to get them involved in learning and socializing opportunities, Head Start and pre-K programs are critical. Regular daycare just isn't the same; most do not offer structure and learning opportunities. Again, by sixth grade, we teachers can tell the difference.

Joan Klein
Toledo, Ohio

My children have been the product of great early childhood education. They were in Montessori preschool for two years and it helped them to advance in their classes now. If it had not been for the great foundation set in a holistic classroom, my children would not be excelling now in highly academic settings.

Debra Hutchinson
Cincinnati, Ohio

I work with at risk students in a large urban school district. Head Start gives my students the educational foundation needed for academic success. The program also provides social and emotional support for students and their parents.

Nita Williams
Toledo, Ohio

I had a student in my kindergarten class (in the 90's) named Khalilah who came back to visit me in 2011 to inform me that she received her law degree!! AWESOME!!

Stephanie Henderson
Cleveland, Ohio

I attended pre-school in 1961, just months after my father died. It gave me a place to be with other kids

my age and to help me deal with the sudden passing of my father in a car accident. Not only was it a welcome distraction, but I also learned skills that enabled me to enter kindergarten the next year able to spell my name, read Dr. Seuss books and be prepared for the schooling I would receive after kindergarten. My preschool teacher, Miss Starr, remains a real beacon in my early memories of someone who willingly nurtured 4 year olds like me and took special care to help me adjust to losing my father as well. Now I work on a bookmobile that serves a lot of Head Start and preschool programs and I have seen in my nearly 28 years of doing this job how important it is for kids to have early intervention and exposure to books and reading, especially inner city kids who live in at risk situations where they might not otherwise have that opportunity to be exposed to early literacy programs. I can't advocate enough for preschool and Head Start programs, having seen for myself both in my own experience with it as well as working with other children now for all these years. Kids need this sort of early childhood education to be better prepared to enter school so that they aren't behind their peers and in need of remedial education to catch them up. It's a great bang for your buck, trust me. It's a wise investment that should not be cut off. You need an educated citizenry to be able to look toward a bright future for our country, and that also includes at risk children who badly need Head Start programs and preschool. Trust me, I speak from first hand experience!

Sally Burnell
Kent, Ohio

My children have been the product of great early childhood education. They were in Montessori preschool for two years and it helped them to advance in their classes now. If it had not been for the great foundation set in a holistic classroom, my children would not be excelling now in highly academic settings.

Debra Hutchinson
Cincinnati, Ohio

A parent I know felt that she did not give her child enough learning time and wasn't sure how to do that. I suggested that she look into preschool near her school. She did and her child just blossomed. She graduated in the top 10 of her class.

Joyce Johnson
Cincinnati, Ohio

Teacher, Teacher what do you see? I see children wanting a safe environment to be a part of. I see children wanting a warm smile and a big hug each and every day. I see children enjoying the activities that are planned for them in the summer. I see children growing and nurturing to a level of learning that exceed their growth. I see children making friends that they can grow up with long into their adult life. I see caring teachers that LOVE their job, also a staff that is hard to replace.

Early Childhood Teacher
Cleveland Heights, Ohio

I have had parents of children that were in my preschool classroom come to me letting me know that their child is reading. They stop and thank me. They saw my efforts and let me know how much it was appreciated. I hope one day I will have the opportunity to help mentor and coach new teachers or directors as the many organizations that have helped me in my journey.

Teacher
Loveland, Ohio

Over the past 30 years of offering quality services to children and families, I have witnessed so, so many success stories.

The most impressive thing is watching the changes the families go through when entering the center. Mom or Dad has just found an entry level position

and receives funding for childcare; Mom had decided to return to school for a GED or enter college or job training. The first few weeks are difficult as they forget to bring a lunch or forget a pair of extra shoes. That evens off after a short time, and little by little things get better and more stable for the whole family. A reliable car and a reliable schedule, decent housing. Screenings and assessment have been administered and meetings take place with the parents to empower their efforts to help educate their children.

Parent co-pays to the counties are minimal. Slowly, the copays increase over the next few years and by the time the child has entered kindergarten the family is self-pay! The system can continue to work with increased funding.

Child Care Center Owner
Madison, Ohio

“What do I see?” I see children learning social skills and academics. I see children teaching their peers what they have learned. I also see children getting nutritious meals that help them to function. I see parents spend time volunteering and assisting their child’s teacher with helping their child succeed in school. I also see many teachers working hard to prepare the children for their next journey: kindergarten. That’s what I see!

Teacher
Cleveland, Ohio

So many things have happened in these 20 years at our center:

We have grown larger and more diverse.

We have welcomed additions and mourned losses.

We have grown as educators through our special needs children.

We have said goodbye to children taken too soon.

We have been the constant in children’s lives as their

parents have gone through treatment for cancer.

We have been the arms of familiar comfort to children when they have lost a parent.

We have been willing to tell parents the hard-to-hear truth to get children the help they need.

We have been the cheerleaders for children as they grab their own victories, big and small, every day.

We have had memorials for hamsters, birds, guinea pigs, bunnies, and other lost furry friends.

We have caught and relocated spiders to teach that every creature has its place.

We have played that game and sang that song again... and again...and again...and again.

We have applied Band-Aids, ice packs, hugs, and kisses to so many boo-boos.

We have seen enrollment rise and fall and rise again in an ever changing economy.

We have seen technology become vital, enriching our teaching methods and our classrooms.

We have seen endless kiddos in Ohio State gear marching the halls to the Buckeye Battle Cry.

We have seen one original building grow into 3 buildings, with over 26,000 square feet of space.

We have become an integral part of our local community through education and involvement.

We have taught ABC’s & 123’s to children, and years later attended high school and college graduations.

We have been told by countless families about the impact we had on their children’s lives, and of lasting friendships formed by children.

We invite all of our local, state, and federal lawmakers to join us, hear our story, and see how quality early childhood education benefits children, families and the community in the short and long term.

Teacher
Columbus, Ohio

Oklahoma

At just four months of age, Adelaide Dexter had undergone three rounds of increasingly strong antibiotics for severe ear infections to no avail. She had shown little to no symptoms and her parents, Jennie and Money Dexter, would not have known the severity until her next well-baby checkup, had it not been for LINK, a project through their local Community Service Council. LINK facilitated this knowledge via developmental prescreening in her child care center at the time. By 6-months-old, Adelaide had undergone her first dual myringotomy (ear tube surgery) and was suddenly hearing and vocalizing like never before. Now, Adelaide is a joyful, energetic little girl. While her health has stabilized, her day care and education have not. She is now attending her fourth day care setting in less than three years. There is a child care crisis, and Tulsa parents are rapidly losing early child care options as high quality, affordable centers close their doors. Again, the Community Service Council came to the rescue, helping the Dexters find a relatively inexpensive, yet very high quality day care center for Addie. They can finally breathe, knowing their daughter is in a stable environment that they can afford. Jennie and Money are working to ensure that all children in Oklahoma have access to high quality program.

Jennie Dexter Oklahoma

The following is from a parent involved in the CAP Learning@Home Parents as Teachers program with her toddler daughter: Looking back on the 4 months we've been involved with CAP PAT program, I wouldn't know where to start describing how I've grown as a parent. I come from a totally different cultural background where children have to obey their elders or face consequences, a society where maids raise the kids of an average working class family while the parents are busy pursuing careers and such. As a first time parent, I wanted to give my child the best opportunity for success in all areas of her life. Now, I am

more in tune with my child because I am more involved with her development and I am more aware of her needs. The PAT program gave me this opportunity.

My parent educator helped me learn how to be patient with her, how to use strategies such as routines and positive discipline (which by the way for me is totally new and contrary to what my culture promotes) to make parenting more enjoyable. Now, if she acts out of character, I usually have an idea what the problem might be because I'm more in tune with her non-verbal cues. I'm not sure what my parenting style would be if I did not participate in PAT and how it would have affected my child but I'm very grateful for the opportunity to learn so much about my child, be close to her, understand her and help her to reach her developmental milestones. My child and I always look forward to our visits with Ms. Chris and we learn so much from her every time she is here. Thank you for giving us this opportunity.

Chris Maricle Oklahoma

I receive child care assistance through my local DHS office, if I didn't get this assistance i could not work (even though I live paycheck to paycheck) and would have to apply for Welfare. I'm more than grateful for every penny I receive for child care without it I would have to pay 120.00/wk! My daughter is learning so much from the pre-k program that is offered she knows how to count, read (some small sentences) knows her alphabet and she knows how to draw, she is four yrs old....I hate to find out what would happen if these programs lost funding...Unless congress wants to pay for parents to stay at home I don't see where cutting funding would be a smart decision on their part.

Amanda Wieland Tula, Oklahoma

As a former Head Start teacher, I worked with many Latino families who spoke little or no English. Because Head Start was available for these families, the children and their families were able to improve their English speaking skills before entering the public education system. In the classroom, I encouraged children to speak English, but also partially spoke with them in Spanish to encourage the maintenance of their culture and to make them comfortable in the classroom. We were also able to refer families to free ESL classes offered in our community to help them become fluent in English. Without Head Start, many of these parents and children would have been considerably less prepared to enter the public school system.

Melissa Long
Tulsa, Oklahoma



Oregon

I am a single parent raising a preschooler (soon to be kindergartener) who experiences Autism. A year and a half ago, I had to make the decision to quit my relatively secure and decently-paying job to stay home with my son because there were no available preschools in town that could effectively deal with his behaviors. The preschools qualified for this task are all under full time, and have wait lists sometimes two years long. The preschools we tried before that all cost \$800 a month, which was more than my rent, and more than a third of my take home pay at the time. They kept asking ME how to handle his behaviors. Aren't they supposed to be the professionals?

Sarah Williams
Corvallis, Oregon

I am a single mother and student. If it weren't for Head Start, my daughter would have never been able to go to preschool. Now she is in 5th grade, and flourishing! Preschool set the foundation for her to grow into her potential. All children deserve that!

Robin Witt
Portland, Oregon

I have two children, my oldest is three, and has been in daycare since 9 months, and his brother has been in daycare since 3 months old. I was lucky that my mother was able to stay with my first son after I had to go back to work when he was 6 weeks old. Since we had to pay out of pocket for both my maternity leaves we could only afford to go without my income for a short time, thanks to a windfall we were able to afford an extra 6 weeks, but even then I only got to spend 3 months in the most precious time of my son's life before I had to go back to work. I had to trust that he would be fine without me. I adore our daycare provider, and we have been with her for over two years

now. She cares about my kids, and it enables her to stay at home with her daughter. I do not begrudge her the money we pay because it is worth knowing that my children are in a safe environment with someone that cares about them. However I spend over half of my take home pay on childcare.

My husband and I make more than is allowed to receive assistance, and if I didn't have my husband's income to pay our bills I wouldn't be able to work because the cost is so prohibitive. When I look into the Preschool programs that I would like to enroll my eldest in I want to cry. There is no way that we can afford to put him in a good educational preschool like I feel he deserves. My husband and I are doing really well compared to many in this economy, but we are holding on by a thread. Our savings are gone, we have no retirement plan, we are trying to buy our first house through the VA program, and we just want to provide a stable loving home to our children. How are mothers and fathers supposed to raise good people when we have to spend all day at work to pay someone else to raise our kids?

Sara Simmons
Eugene, Oregon

I'm a well-educated working mom, and finding good childcare was a real challenge. I also found that 'good' is synonymous with 'expensive.' I had my first child while I was in graduate school. I needed to find part-time care for my baby so that I could go to classes and finish my degree, and then work. I remember having a heck of a time finding good care for an infant. I tried home day care providers and had a miserable failure with a woman who apparently plopped my baby in front of a TV on a regular basis, and then would grab her up and hold her only when I'd come to get her. We went through a half-dozen options to find a caregiver. When my second baby came along I was

working full time. I put my name on the wait list for a good daycare center, but meanwhile I had my 2 little ones enrolled in a less-than-clean home care center where both kids (and me) ended up getting lice. Ugh! I almost gave up, but finally got in to a great daycare center situation that was really good, but terribly expensive. My husband and I weighed whether it would be worth it for one of us to stay home, as we were paying almost one entire salary to care for the 2 kids—in particular infant care (less than 12 months) was off-the-chart expensive, but at the same time, women are expected to go back to work when their babies are 6 to 12 weeks old, or their jobs are at risk. As a well-educated person I recognized had the resources to find, apply for, and secure good quality daycare, and still could barely afford to pay for it in a family with 2 working college-educated parents. I can't imagine what it would be like for a minimum-wage worker family.

Kathleen Forrester
Eugene, Oregon

Early learning is a great way to socialize young children before they go onto grade school. My son was able to take the skills that he learned from his pre-school teachers to kindergarten, these skills allowed him to socially interact with other children more easily. He also had learned how to write his name, sing songs and count before kindergarten. These programs are valuable, in the fact that they help to teach and build confidence. These programs allow working parents a safe place to leave children while they provide for their families.

Regan H.
Gresham, Oregon

My family is lucky enough to have found and been able to afford, extraordinary childcare. My two boys (27 months and 3 months) spend their days with people who care about them and who help them learn through play and by exploring nature. The teachers are engaged in ongoing education programs, ranging from infant child development workshops to art and dance classes. My husband and I are college professors and what has struck us about early child care is the discrepancy between the importance of the work and how devalued it is by our culture. A child's experience of these early years is just as, if not more important than a college education. And yet, I am required to have 10 plus years of training to teach a class while child care providers receive little or no training. This devaluation of child care work is evident in the low pay and often impossible working conditions of the child-care providers, most often in high teacher/child ratios. This work can be intellectually engaging and fulfilling, and yet many creative and smart young people who do it for a few years simply cannot choose it as a career because the pay is so low. Affordability is important, but it cannot be achieved by underpaying child care providers. We need to value the work child care providers engage in and make it a real career choice by paying a living wage and by providing more training.

Jennifer Schuberth
Portland, Oregon

Pennsylvania

After advocating for greater investment and improved policies for young children for more than 15 years as a business leader, it's gratifying to see early childhood starting to receive the national attention it deserves. The future of health and welfare of our society depends on a citizenry that is educated, vital and productive. But business people are largely removed from the personal impact this work has, so success stories are important. A few years ago some of us were fortunate enough to be able to sponsor the three-year old son of a single mother colleague in high quality pre-school. Before attending, the little boy did not speak except in unintelligible single words. One month after starting pre-school, he was speaking in comprehensible phrases and sentences. This child continues to make progress in school today and is a happy, confident kid. Supporting early childhood can be a pursuit of the heart, but beyond that it is responsible stewardship of our children and our future.

Philip Peterson
Pennsylvania

As a former elementary school teacher, I can tell you that the inner-city school children that I taught were so much more prepared to learn than some of my other students who did not participate in Head Start or Get Set programs. They learned readiness skills that became the essential building blocks for success in school.

Helen Rosen
Ivyland, Pennsylvania

Over 13 years ago, my son, Egan, was a student at our local Head Start program. (Capital Area Head Start in Harrisburg, PA.) I was a single mom of three, working part time while taking college classes. To say we lived below the poverty line is putting it mildly—without assistance such as food stamps, Section 8 housing and early education, we wouldn't have been able to survive. Moving forward, my once little boy who started

Head Start is now a high school graduate who is serving his county through the United States Air Force.

Mary Hall
Pennsylvania

My students leave my classroom writing their full name, abc's, shapes recognition, colors, number recognition (0-20), writing complete simple sentences, and reading.

Wilma Henderson
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Quality Child Care is the key! When children are introduced to Early Childhood Education, it makes a difference in their life long education journey. Please invest in our children.

Nova Johnson-Derry
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

The several schools I have had the honor of working in all had the Head Start program. Watching these students learning basic shapes, numbers, and how to share with each other was very nice to see, but the true value of this was shown to me when I saw a little girl having problems using the computer. Not one, but THREE of her classmates immediately went to her side and offered to help guide her and soon she was happily coloring a picture. Without programs like Head Start, this child might not have the opportunity to learn what community and friendship is all about. She made several new friends that day from what I later found out.

Michael Bernstein
Eagleview, Pennsylvania

I started my career in 1992 assisting in early childhood program in Pittsburgh Public School system.

The joy of going to work to assist the staff in teaching the children was so awesome. We had meetings after class to brainstorm on new ways to introduce ideas to those young developing minds. We could see the progress in our students as they grew to be comfortable in school setting and learn how to mingle, work and play with their classmates. Parents were excited to hear from their children what they have learned and how to put it into practice. We were very creative as teachers, assistants and other staff to make it an enjoyable learning experience for all. I worked several summers in the program also continuing the learning in fun summer activities. Keeping them engaged in the activities within the classroom and outside in the neighborhood. It was long hours but fun and exciting. I have moved from this area to teach special ed. students vocational training. But three years ago was given another opportunity to engage in Early Childhood class with special ed. students assisting in the classroom. It was a dream come true of a great collaboration. The progress that I see and experience with my vocational students and early childhood is mind boggling. I'm here to tell you that we need more Early Childhood programs to give our children that much needed boost in education. Continue to give our children that great positive start to education.

Tracy Roney
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

As the Principal of a Pre-K to 8 school, the value of our Head Start classroom can only be described as essential. The Head Start graduates enter kindergarten fully prepared for ongoing success in school. Nothing can be more important!

Karen Thomas
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

My kids go to a Bright Horizons school in King of Prussia. The school serves children from 6 weeks of age through kindergarten, and every child in the

school is treated as a good learner. These kids start kindergarten knowing how to learn, and many have started to read and write during pre-K. The teachers are fabulous and committed to our kids. The thing is, this school is not cheap. This should be the standard for early childhood education but there is no way most families could afford to send their kids here, especially if they have more than one under the age of 6. Because so many families are supported by two working parents, we need good programs that most families can afford that provide quality care and education for young children. I know I am blessed to be able to provide this for my kids.

Elizabeth Ryland
Lansdale, Pennsylvania

As a teacher I know the value of Head Start. Students who attend pre-school and early childhood programs come to kindergarten and the primary grades ready to learn! They are the students that have learned how to co-operate with their peers and interact with adults. I worked in kindergarten centers and in bi-lingual schools in urban areas. Head Start children stand out like shining stars!

Barb Fowler
Nazareth, Pennsylvania

My 5 year old son has resisted any academic learning promoted by me, my husband or other children. He entered pre-k this year not knowing his letters or numbers. He is still resistant (and there may be some other underlying reasons we have not figure out yet) BUT he is in a warm, loving environment with two teachers who really inspire and care for him and he is beginning to come out of his shell and learn his letters. He will sit at home with a magazine or a chapter book playing search and find for the letters he has already learned. I could not do this at home, and in a less excellent environment, he would not be properly prepared for kindergarten next year. My son needs the



pre-school, nursery-school environment with excellent and caring teachers and peers in order to excel. I would not be able to educate him on my own.

Naomi Koltun-Fromm
Haverford, Pennsylvania

During my past 3 years with Jumpstart, I have served as a Corps Member, Team Leader, and a Volunteer Coordinator. My first year with Jumpstart, there was a difficult, obstinate child in our session. In the fall, he always put up a fight to read with his Jumpstart friend and refused to join us at circle time. In the winter, however, he began to come around to Jumpstart. He would quietly listen during reading and sit in a chair on the outside of the circle during circle time. By the last Jumpstart session, he actively participated in reading and circle time. This past year, he attended our family literacy event with his mother and younger brothers. During the event, I saw him sitting on the couch, reading "The Cat in the Hat" aloud. His mother then told me that the books he received from Jumpstart are the only books in their home. As they left the event, new Dr. Seuss books in hand, I felt confident that Jumpstart has made and continues to make him into the learner he is today.

Gina Federico
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

I see a baby's first roll, first smile...

I see a toddler's first word, first steps...

I see a two year old learning to share...

I see a three year old become more independent and come into "their own"...

I see a four year old prepare for Kindergarten...

We are a community, a family, and we are here with the children- quite often- more than the children are at home. We get to be a part of their lives during their

most precious years and quite often our teachers don't get the credit they deserve. We are not babysitters, we are early childhood educators.

Child Care Center Director
Allentown, Pennsylvania

I would like to share that my daughter has thrived at our child care center. The teachers really care and are so active with our children. She enjoys going to daycare and playing and learning with her peers. It's such a joy being able to drop her off and feeling ok about that. It's very hard as a single mother to entrust in another person to care for your child while you are working. It has given me great peace of mind knowing my child is being cared for by teachers that love what they do and engage in everyday things with your child. She is always happy and smiling and that means so much to me. I would hope that Congress would see the great benefit in funding these programs and understand that it is very important to shape our children early on in life before they actually start school. Without that help most of us could NOT afford to send our children to daycare so we can go to work every day and be productive citizens and show our children the example of working hard and not depending on welfare to support us.

Parent
Allentown, Pennsylvania

I have worked for several years in a reverse-mainstream classroom made up of typically developing, early intervention, and behavioral supports. I have witnessed profound growth and development with each child. The extraordinary gains in social skills support the children's cognitive growth. Exposure to language all day long, learning skills in self-regulation, focus, and problem solving are important steps taken by all the children enhancing their ability to progress to higher skill levels. We recognize the ability to exceed in every child in our care. I have witnessed many

children enter a class in the beginning of the school year, crying and clinging to their parents or some with little or no skills become transformed into confident, inquisitive learners. Even the little steps that some of the children may make are a celebration for us all. Many of the children that pass through my classroom have returned with their parents to thank us for the wonderful start they have obtained attending our program. Children are exposed to all areas of learning and begin to dream of who they may become or what they will do when they are older. After learning about butterflies, the children began using large pillows and material wrapping themselves up and bursting out saying, "Look! We are butterfly people. Now we can fly." Playing in water a child grabbed a sponge from the sink, put it in the water and squeezed it. "Look I made a cloud! The cloud (sponge) got all the water. It let it go and it rained!" There are many more stories I could share.

Teacher

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

I had both my boys in Pre-K Counts. I am so happy with the program. They both did so well and I was able to see them grow from week to week. The teachers were awesome. Both my boys were more than ready for kindergarten, in fact they both scored 40 out of 40 on their kindergarten orientation testing. My youngest Olivia will be in the program this fall. I would not want her to be in any other program.

Parent

Farichance, Pennsylvania

During the past school year, I had the opportunity to get to know an intelligent boy, who had some habits and characteristics I had rarely seen before. These habits and characteristics impeded his social relationships with peers and adults alike. After making careful observation notes and asking for an evaluation by the local Intermediate Unit, I continued to use

appropriate intervention strategies in order to guide this student. He struggled to establish relationships with his peers, so I made sure that I was near him as much as possible to help him smooth over the rough spots. He continued to try hard to learn the expectations and social skills necessary to feel successful in the classroom. The PATHS curriculum helped him to learn strategies for calming down and seeing another person's point of view. Through the year he received regular observations by staff from the IU, and I received feedback concerning his progress and needs. His mother was extremely supportive in our efforts to make a positive turn around for her son. He was evaluated not only by the IU, but also by his pediatrician and mental health professionals. The process took several months, but with good results. He was accepted into a regional charter school which currently has a waiting list. He will be starting Kindergarten there in just a few days. Both his mother and I are thrilled at his progress. I look forward to hearing more about this little boy throughout the years. I believe that his success so far has been because of the supportive and reciprocal relationship I established with his mother.

Mary Rose Kelly

York, Pennsylvania

When I was employed with Head Start prior to the recent Sequestration, the most rewarding day was near the end of the term as we teachers busy with paperwork and sorting things to give children to take home to their parents, the children in the program room were at play...At one point we looked up and saw to our delight that they were 'playing school' pretending to be teachers and instructing, singing & playing games together, w/o our direct input! It did our hearts good to see them emulate and use what was modeled for them! It was the perfect reward! These were children whose homes we visited were not obvious in the display of child-oriented activities and books, artwork and age-appropriate toys. If they had toys, many

were scattered and that is a sign of confusion and lack of modeling to even know how to use imagination and enjoy playing. It's not the number of things a child has, but rather the ability to escape into a child's world, that is important. At Pre-K and especially Head Start, they are able to do so.

Monica Ciotti
Johnstown, Pennsylvania

I am writing this letter to share with you why early childhood education is vital for children from birth to five years of age. I know many of you have seen the research and have been inundated with facts and figures, but have you ever taken the time to really sit and listen to the stories from teachers and parents? Children are learning from the day they are conceived. The brain is building roadmaps for future learning experiences before they are born. A child comes into this world as a blank slate ready to consume as much information as possible. Educating children as soon as birth is important to the future successes of a child. There has been so much emphasis placed on children living in poverty or at risk that we are forgetting that even the typical developing child is eager to learn. By providing high quality child care for families regardless of their socio-economic status, we are giving ALL children the steps to building higher educational goals.

There is no doubt that children who attend quality preschool or early child care centers have a much higher rate of graduating and attending college. There is also the fact that these children are less likely to be offenders and entering into the juvenile or adult justice programs. I have worked in private preschool programs, Head Start, and Early Intervention programs. All of these children deserve to have the same quality care regardless of income or needs. Investing in children before the age of 5 years will help lower the costs for the criminal justice system. Isn't this an investment worth making? Where do our priorities start with children? Investing in children when they are younger will help teach them important social-emotional skills

that are lost to them if not reached before the age of five such as empathy for others, following rules and directions, problem solving issues, and learning to get along with others.

I ask you to visit centers and see what they are doing to help children meet developmental milestones and social-emotional skills. Come and visit at our center and see how we are integrating children with disabilities into classrooms with typical developing peers and building a community of learners that have empathy and caring for others regardless of their needs. It is time we put our money into investments that will pay off in other ways than monetary values. We are building a society that will want to achieve higher goals and push the envelope for learning. Invest now in the future!

Kelly Hummert
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

The head start program was amazing for my child. With working full time it is hard to give enough attention to the fundamentals of learning with my children, the program took my daughter from not even knowing her letters or numbers to being able to count to thirty without help and recite her alphabet with no problems. She sings songs and helps her sisters to do the same. It's as though she is trying to teach them. She would come home from school and tell me all about what happened and how much she loved going and loved her teachers. They not only took an interest in her but they would also ask me about my other girls and tell me how they couldn't wait to get them into their class. Over all i believe that every child should experience a program like head start, it has given my daughter a new outlook on school and now as she heads into kindergarten she is excited to learn not scared and I like that Head start had something to do with that.

Catherine Cross
Pennsylvania

Brown Bear, Brown Bear
What do you see?
Little lost eyes looking at me.
Brown Bear, Brown Bear
What can you say?
Come little eyes, look this way.
Brown Bear, Brown Bear
Now, what do you see?
A glimmer in their eyes looking back at me.
Brown Bear, Brown Bear
What to do now?
Show them the way,
Show them how.

Brown Bear, Brown Bear
Now, what do you say?
Keep these programs! Show them the way!
To bring that glimmer to their eyes,
To help these children reach the SKY!!!!!!

Lois Annette Lamb
Pennsylvania



Rhode Island

As a professor of Pediatric Nursing, I arranged a Head Start placement for my students each semester. Each was required to develop and present an age-appropriate health teaching project. These projects were creative and were usually great learning experiences for the pre-school children. They often included something to take home to reinforce/share their learning with their families. I watched the children's eyes shine as they participated and learned.

Mary Burke
Rhode Island

I would like to share my father's story, as I am incredibly proud of him and the work he's done. My dad, David MacDonald, started a mortgage company in the 80s in Rhode Island. His company was successful but he always seemed to have trouble retaining employees - not because of his business but because too often his employees left the workforce after having children. They simply could not find a reliable, high quality care giver that could give them the peace of mind to return to work. So, ever the entrepreneur and a sympathetic father himself, my dad founded a child care and early education company in 1990 to give his employees exactly what they were looking for. He partnered with two talented early childhood education specialists and they launched the company that is The Children's Workshop today. My father, like many businesspeople, truly understands the value of quality early childhood education and care. Not only does it give working parents peace of mind and comfort that they are leaving their most precious cargo with caring, loving, nurturing caregivers while they are at work but it also provides their children with a true, proven and measurable advantage. Beyond simply preparing them for Kindergarten and formal education, early childhood education gives children the foundation they need for success in life. Dave recognized this and not only provided a great benefit for his current employees, but also established a company which provides quality care and education for approximately 1500 children in

19 communities in Rhode Island and Massachusetts today. It's refreshing to see a business leader take initiative to provide for his employees and more importantly their children and the children in his community. I am proud to be his daughter and even more proud to work for him at The Children's Workshop today!

Margaret Teller
Rhode Island

My husband and I are college professors. I think that places us solidly in the 'middle class.' However, even though we live in a fairly low rent apartment, have only one car and are both fully employed, we can't actually find child care we can afford. Every month we barely balance our checkbook and we only have one child! I have no idea how families do it who do not have the job security and relatively good wages that we have (not to mention the health care benefits). It simply seems to make more sense for a lot of families I know to have someone stay home with their child until that child enters school. Unfortunately, that comes with a long term cost in their family's income since long term career prospects are severely damaged by being out of the workforce for years at a time. This simply can not be good for our economy. If the government really wants to help the economy, try helping struggling families afford the basics that makes it possible for them to continue to be productive workers.

Shanna Pearson
Providence, Rhode Island

I work part-time and support my family (my husband is a student), so I need reliable childcare for my two boys, ages 4 years and 7 months. The cost of pre-school for our older child, and 3 mornings/ week of daycare for our baby, is more than our rent. The cost of childcare is outrageous. We need real government support for working parents.

Katherine Silberman
Providence, Rhode Island

South Carolina

I knew we had found the right preschool for my 3 year old son on his first day of school, when I walked into his room, late, the last mother there, and found his teacher holding him in her arms, snuggling with him while they watched for me out the window. He is not in a 'mill' style daycare but in a real, warm, loving environment (which is only possible because as a self-employed stay-at-home mother, I am able to deduct the cost of his care from my taxes). Every child should be as fortunate, and every parent deserves to know that their child is treated the same as if they'd stayed home.

Christa Miller

Greenville, South Carolina



South Dakota

I have been in the early childhood field since 1981. My experience includes family daycare, Head Start, head teacher in a center, opened and operated my own center and currently I'm a director of a child care center located within a nursing home. I strongly believe that our country's young children deserve quality care in a nurturing, caring environment. Another strong belief of mine is that early childhood caregivers deserve to be recognized as professionals and paid at very least a wage that allows them to be able to stay in the field.

We struggle monthly trying to meet our budget. We're fortunate that our nursing home's administrator and our board of directors recognize the importance of offering a quality child care program and the difficulty in making it financially feasible. We have had to limit the amount of children we can accept on child care assistance because of past difficulties in collecting from the parents the amount child care assistance doesn't cover. These children are quite often the children that can most benefit from a structured quality program. If child care assistance and the food program cut their benefits for child care we may be forced to not accept children on assistance at all. This would break my heart because all children deserve quality care not just the children whose parents can afford to pay the full cost of it. Serving nutritious meals and snacks are expensive and I don't want to make a decision to cut back on the nutritionally balanced foods we currently serve the children.

We are a fairly small community and have lost one center a few years ago and there is talk of another one closing their doors. We cannot absorb any more cuts in early childhood funding. We need more funding for quality care to be available for all children!

Shelly Buckmeler
Aberdeen, South Dakota

Tennessee

My son and daughter-in-law have always struggled with the high cost of quality day care for their family. It takes two incomes just to pay the bills and the high cost of decent day care is a hardship on their family. Our county only has after school programs for low income and children failing in school. There is no after school enrichment programs in the small counties of Tennessee. I feel our country is doing a disservice to our children by not offering programs that would help them compete with other countries as an adult. We are also doing a disservice to the families of this nation by blaming the parents when a child is failing if we are not willing to support them by providing services that they need as working and contributing members of our society. We need family friendly policies in our country that rewards hard working families with services and supports they so desperately need.

Linda Tift
Chapel Hill, Tennessee

I am a family/group home daycare. I accept Family First through the state of Tennessee. I do this program is because it helps mothers/parents that cannot afford otherwise to have their child in an early learning environment. I have had parents with children that can hardly even talk at age 2 come into my daycare and in no time they are talk and communicate at an age appropriate level they should be on. A lot of parents just won't take the time to talk read or teach their children anything when all it takes is a little love and affection and time with these little ones and they are like sponges soak up anything you set out there for them.

I would like to see daycares get grants to help fund for supplies and learning toys for the children. Outside play equipment to help them get their physical exercise they need. I myself put all my money I make (which is very little) back into my daycare so my children will have what they need to succeed. I could do so much more with them with some sort of grants

towards early learning for ages 6wks to 5 yrs. I do believe with funding for programs to help parents with daycare the children would benefit from early learning that they typically do not get at home.

Wanda Risner
Ethridge, Tennessee

Children who have the advantage of a Pre-K program enter school with a variety of skills ranging from literacy and language to social/emotional skills. One benefit of Pre-K is that children who attend develop language skills they may not otherwise have. As Pre-K teachers, we talk with children all day long—during indoor and outdoor play, during mealtimes, and during routines and transitions. Their ability to carry on a meaningful conversation develops and they learn to express their feelings through appropriate language. Children learn to ask for what they need, compliment each other, and help each other with new skills—all of these things are part of healthy social/emotional development. Pre-K teaches children more than just letters and numbers—so much of what children need to know nowadays is more than cognitive skills—it is the skills to be successful in life that are necessary—sharing, being kind to others, being able to communicate well in their world, and being able to self-regulate. Pre-K gives children the head start they need in their education but also offers lessons that will take them on through school and through life.

Sharon Ferguson
Chattanooga, Tennessee

Texas

I am a retired elementary school counselor. One of the things that I did at the beginning of each year was to give the Peabody Vocabulary test to all incoming four year olds. I along with most of my colleagues, I was saddened and enlightened by how often the results were the child had basically no vocabulary. Children must be exposed to words to know them. Their experiences in pre-school helped them so much. It was quite amazing. There has to be real personal interaction for language to develop and this was a novel and exciting discovery for more children than most would ever imagine. These babies blossomed and were better prepared for the challenges of education and life. This is an opportunity, and it is criminal to deny our future generations. If they are to compete, they need the basic communication skills to work with. Kudos to all teachers, and especially those in early childhood, they indeed touch the future.

Dorieta Rodgers
Lubbock, Texas

As a long-time volunteer reader to kindergarten children and tutor to first grade pupils, I have seen clearly the benefits that any type of earlier help in education can benefit these children. It helps them tremendously in being able to take advantage of later educational opportunities.

Alvy King
Austin, Texas

I taught pre-k for 8 years before moving up to other grades. Pre-K by far is the most rewarding of the grades to teach. The amount of social and academic growth that occurs is amazing. As a teacher of an upper grade now I see a tremendous difference between kids who have been in pre-k and those who haven't. My school has begun to track and compare data of the two groups and there is a difference.

Susan Castro
San Antonio, Texas

I visited a Pre-K classroom and witnessed how effective the teacher has been teaching her little ones problem solving. A little boy came to us and complained to the teacher about an altercation with another youngster. The teacher lovingly reminded him about what he should have done before coming to her. He said, "Oh, yeah. I forgot." He then turned around, I saw him talk to the other youngster and then go on to another learning center.

Sylvia Lovelace
San Antonio, Texas

I know that some of my children are young adults now; but I will never forget what Head Start early learning has done for them. I was so excited about continuing my children in the program, that I drove 20 miles to make sure that got a great learning start in their lives. The greatest impact to me was how every teacher in that school knew our children's name whether they were in their class or not. They made it personal to reach out in the lives of the soul of our children. It spoke volumes to my heart, and brought back great memories of the teachers in my elementary school who poured out their time, energy, passion, and expertise to children like myself. Early learning blocks away the present evil that surfaces around our children on a daily basis, to cope with what their innocent eyes see. Shame on the people who have the power to speak up for these babies in whom God has entrusted us with. This is not a choice, but a duty and a commandment that is higher than us.

Dorothy Burch
Dallas, Texas

I taught children with special needs. If it hadn't been for them starting at age 3, they wouldn't become successful individual people in our society. Much needs to be changed for the special needs but I had experience of going into kindergarten for inclusion and these children were not prepared for school. Many parents

don't work with their children up till five years of age. You can tell this right off. I have nieces and nephews that don't know how to spell their first and last name by first grade. Much has been put on the teacher's shoulders but parents need to be held responsible too. Since we aren't getting support from parents we have to get the children ready.

Nicole Socolov
Texas

February 28, 2013...Just thought I would give you a little info about Ayana. Her teacher often says she can't believe she is only in Kindergarten. Her manners and handwriting are above and beyond those of most kindergartners. Her social skills are also above those of her peers. I honestly give the credit to Rosemary and her team at Sunset Head Start! She actually writes more legibly than most adults I know! She is either right on target or has surpassed the target on all the skills they test on. Her homework last Thursday was to read as many sight words as possible in one minute; she read 44. (Not sure if that is high or low, but I am proud!) She reads books to me now with minimal assistance. She can also count unlimited I suppose. She has it figured out that they go in order and that order continues! She was into the 500's by the time we got home one day. She only stopped counting because we got home and she started playing! In other words, she entered Kindergarten well prepared and hasn't slowed down for a minute! She constantly impresses me. Her classroom behavior has always been on green, purple, or pink. These stand for good, better, best respectively.

As for me, I have taken on the PTO presidency at Ayana's school. The school hadn't had a PTO in years and had to be started from the ground up. It's a work in progress, but so far so good! I am also on the KISD district improvement committee as a parent representative. Of course, you know my involvement with you guys (Head Start). I also graduated from University of Phoenix in August 2012 and am getting my

things together to start a Master's program in May/June this year! Something that should go on the self-assessment: Head Start helps parents identify goals and continuously encourages parents to reach them. When I started with Head Start I had to write down my long and short-term goals. Miss Chris asked me from time-to-time how I was doing on my goals. It made me accountable for my goals. I have now completed 2 of the 3 long term goals I listed. 1) move into a house... did that! 2) Start on Bachelor's...completed that! 3) Start a business...still working on it, but haven't lost sight of it! So, if people don't think Head Start is important they are wrong. This program has helped me and my daughter to grow tremendously! I know my story is not the only Head Start success story, there are many more.

Ryane Postell
Texas

I have three children, ages 5, 4, and 2. I have a Masters in Teaching but am currently staying home from a full-time career in education and working only three evenings a week at Starbucks. The decision to put my career on hold came largely because of the cost of childcare for small children in my area, a suburb north of Dallas. The enrollment and supply fees and monthly 'tuition' (that's a very generous word given the lack of true early childhood curriculum in most centers) for my three children would cost at least \$1700 a month, and that's with my five-year-old only receiving before- and after-school care. It would be very easy to spend more than this for quality care that is in an academic, preschool-type setting (Primrose and the Goddard School, for example, both would have been \$2200 a month). In comparison, my mortgage payment is \$1090 each month, and when I was teaching, my take-home pay was \$2800 each month. I'm confident that ours is not the only family struggling to make ends meet and making the difficult decision for one parent to stay home from full-time work in order to avoid the cost of child care. Why, in this country, do

we only formally educate children beginning at age 5? What a waste of young, developing minds. Public preschools would benefit everyone, even those who do not have young children, because we all benefit from a well-educated populace. As a mother and an educator, I can't think of a more glaring lack of investment in our children than to ignore this critical developmental time (birth to age 5) in their lives. Please, do everything you can to make public preschool a reality.

Melissa Guerrero
Allen, Texas

As a grandmother, I had the opportunity to see 1st hand the struggles of my daughter's trying to find trustworthy, affordable daycare for my grandchildren. My husband and I even picked up the cost of the \$150-\$225 weekly daycare so that my daughters could afford to work and contribute to the family finances. Not that we could easily afford it, we made sacrifices for our children and grandchildren but to us it was worth it. My biggest fear is that the cost of daycare is out of reach for most Americans to afford so they are left depending on someone to care for their child who might not be the best person. My biggest fear is not knowing what might be going on with an individual and my child if he/she is left in that type of situation. We have had a good experience with the daycare provider we used for our granddaughter but not without sacrifice on our part to afford it.

Cheryl Cortez
Irving, Texas

I am the mother of three children and the two youngest had the benefit of participating, along with my first grandchild in early childhood education, full day in the Dallas Independent School District. It was amazing the learning that took place at the Jimmie Tyler

Brashear EC education center. Our children from the age of 3 were taught to read, write and prepare for elementary school. As a result, they were very prepared when they entered Kindergarten at the R. L. Thornton Elementary School. All three are college graduates today and my husband and I believe that the early introduction to learning facilitated their grasp of learning throughout school.

Though we could have afforded to send them to private institutions, it was our choice to allow them to remain in Public Schools and we were active parents in the success of neighborhood schools.

We sincerely advocate for children who have no parental advocates for the opportunities that our children and grandchildren enjoyed. Today the youngest of the three is a public school teacher.

Dr. Ouida and John C. Lee, Jr.
Dallas, Texas

I have to share with you my joy from this evening: I had to pull out the old school dictionary to look up onomatopoeia because my child used it in a sentence this evening. I did a double (or maybe even a triple) take. She is three and a half. She was talking about the sounds that animals make.

"Who taught you that word?" I asked.

"Ms. Becky did," she matter-of-factly stated, like it was no big deal.

Well, I want to tell you that it is a big deal! My daughter loves school so much, and we know it is due to the amazing adults who are the backbone of the school. Every morning she asks if it is a school day.

Parent
Round Rock, Texas

Utah

I feel like continuing to work is so important as a mother, since I want to be a positive role model to my daughters and I don't want to feel dependent on my husband. However, I am deeply conflicted right now, since the daycare options for my youngest are so limited. My older daughter was cared for by family until she got into my employers' daycare at the age of 2 (this is the youngest age they are admitted). But with my youngest this will soon not be an option. The daycare options are frightening, and I am worried that I may need to quit working because I am too disappointed in the quality of the care available in our area. I think that it is a shame for our family, children, and society, that women are faced with this dilemma.

Erica Fryer
Ogden, Utah

I was helping a young professional couple (both dentists) with their adopted son, aged 2.5 with behavior problems and very limited speech. Together we had determined that "Riley" was often overwhelmed and then became aggressive. Over a few weeks we had worked to simplify his environment, putting most toys onto covered shelves, allowing him to wear a snug "scene blocking" ball cap, and to cover his head with a blanket during car rides. At the beginning of a visit I commented on a darling pint-sized rocking chair, to which his mother said he had only used to throw or climb upon. I demonstrated a playful method of sliding Riley across the carpeted floor on his back and bonking into the padded couch bottom, giving him a good dose of firm, grounding physical input. When I finished, he calmly stood up, said "Hi Dad," and walked to the

small chair, sat back and calmly rocked with a serene smile on his face. His parents (and I!) were amazed and smitten! His parents described "falling in love with him again" over the next few months. Riley graduated from our Early Intervention program at aged three and I continue to hear from friends of the family about his progress and how his parents credit our interventions with saving him from labels of learning disabled, hyperactive and bully. Early Intervention is about getting parents back on their kid's team, giving them the needed tools and sometimes diagnosis, and letting the rest fall into place!

Audrey Graham
Spanish Valley, Utah

Vermont

I work at a large childcare center. At the moment 37 families, more than half of our community, are subsidized. That means even though they are working they can't afford child care on their own. Probably another 10 families don't qualify for subsidy but spend more than half of their income on childcare. Some families can't have their children in a quality center because it's too much for them. On top of that we have teachers with BA's who are working on MA's who make \$12 an hour. This insanity needs to stop. Government get involved.

Joanna McClelland
Burlington, Vermont

I had my oldest child soon after starting graduate school. This meant that I was in the unfortunate position of having little to no income and having to move frequently to complete internships. Each time I would move, I would contact the local child care referral source. They were often very helpful in giving names and contact information for childcare centers in the area. However, they all had long waiting lists and exorbitant tuition. I only qualified very briefly for childcare subsidies and had to find ways to pay childcare bills that matched or exceeded my rent. I also desperately needed the care so that I could finish my degree and become financially stable. I waited to have my second child until after I graduated with a doctoral degree because I knew that there was NO WAY I could afford to put two kids in daycare full time. My son has had the luxury of being at the same daycare since he was 3 months old. That seems wonderful on the surface until I start to count how many teachers he has had (well over 20, and he's 3 1/2). He's had 4 BELOVED teachers leave because of poor pay, limited health care/vacation benefits, and poor working conditions. He still talks about them all and I think those transitions have had a permanent effect on him. I would LOVE to see government subsidized childcare for most people. It's impossible to pay for when you are low-income, and it's REALLY HARD when you are

middle income. I would also like to see infant and preschool teachers compensated at the same level as elementary, middle, and high school teachers. They are treated so poorly and they have such an impact on our collective future.

Amy Harris
Middlesex, Vermont

I used college students as babysitters, and interviewed them with the children first. This worked well for my 5 children and for me, a single mother. When the children were grown I searched out a place where I could volunteer and nurture children, because I think it is so important. The best places turned out to be Head Start, a government program, which hasn't seen an increase in funds for decades. I think it definitely needs to be given more money. The HeadStart program is great, but the money coming into it is terrible!

Rosemary Yaecker
Bradford, Vermont

I have been an Early Childhood professional for 27 years. I have practiced my profession in four states, and I am currently an instructor of home childcare providers in the area of literacy-based arts. Yet I continue to be distressed at the lack of affordable, high-quality childcare available to families who need it. When a friend recently asked me for a recommendation for childcare for her toddler, I found I had few suggestions for her that I could feel good about. I have been in the struggle for high quality childcare that is both affordable for working parents AND provides a livable wage to childcare professionals for so long that I have become rather pessimistic about the situation ever changing, and that is not my nature.

Rosemary Moser
Middletown Springs, Vermont

Virginia

From Head Start to Harvard Law, I am one of the first children to graduate from Head Start (in 1971). My grandfathers were 9th grade drop-outs (one a truck driver, the other a factory foreman), and my mom & grandmothers were secretaries. I became the first woman in my family to graduate from college and one of the first university graduates in my whole family. I graduated from the University of Michigan and Harvard Law School (in the same class as President Obama). I became a Federal prosecutor, law professor, and Senate counsel. I am a wife and mother who is a very active community volunteer. In 2012, I ran for the U.S. House (sharing a ballot with my law school classmate) in the swing district of Battleground Virginia as the Mom-for-Congress. On no time & no money, I did very well despite losing. The American People smartly invested in me with Head Start as well as student loans & grants. Their investment has come back into our society many-fold as I am a higher earner than my foremothers & forefathers, paying more in taxes to help along the next generation. It is always about the children, for they are Priority Number One.

Kristin Cabral
McLean, Virginia

I was standing beside the picnic tables in a throng of fellow preschool parents one Friday in February 2011, just before preschool was letting out for the weekend. The kids were squirming at their picnic tables, the parents sharing jokes and stories in low voices as they waited for the teachers to finish announcements. "Don't forget," said the lead pre-K teacher, a veteran of 28 years at the school. "Give your parents the envelope you have in your hand. It's a very important letter from the school. Have a good weekend and see you on Monday." Some of the parents stopped to read the letter then and there, but I was eager to go, so I grabbed my five-year-old and headed for the gate to the parking lot. I got him settled in the car and caught the eye of a friend who was walking out the gate, shaking her head at another parent. "Can you believe

it?" she asked. "What?" I said. "Did you read it?" she said. "It's unbelievable."

The letter from the superintendent informed the parents of 36 preschoolers that the school board had voted to close the preschool, effective in mid-June. There had been no consultation with preschool parents; the board governed a K-12 system and also the preschool, but did not have any preschool parent representatives and no one in the preschool community, including the teachers who had started the school three decades earlier, had any idea such a letter would be coming. Word spread quickly. By 3:00pm the parents in my neighborhood were at the playground, sharing intelligence; by 8:00pm we had developed a pretty good idea of who on the board had voted which way and were hypothesizing about their motives. By Monday at 9:00am, we had formed a Save Our School committee. Three months and more than 1,000 emails and text messages later, we stopped the closing, secured a one-year extension at the current site, and elected a preschool parent to the new board; a year later, we had engineered a school board vote to build a brand new preschool facility. Today, the school is at its highest enrolment ever.

The effort took us eight weeks of round-the-clock crisis management by a committee of six preschool moms, supported by a dedicated and absolutely furious preschool community of hundreds, followed by almost two years of political maneuverings was well worth it. Why? One fall morning in 2008 when I came to the preschool to pick up my son, who at the time was an obstinate two-year-old and in his first year of preschool, his teacher pulled me aside. "Quite a day today," she said. "I had all the kids (10 in his class) sitting around the table, and put Play Dough in front of each of them. I went inside to get the other supplies, and when I came back, Ryan had all the Play Dough in front of him, and all the other kids were sitting there with nothing." I groaned, of course, but she stopped me. "He's a clever kid," she said. "You can be logical with him. I explained why he couldn't have it all to

himself, and he was fine with it.” She had also figured out, after knowing him for exactly four days, how to convince him to let go of the idea that every time the class sat in their chairs, he had to have the yellow one with the scratch on the side. She got it. She got two-year-olds and their personalities, their hang-ups, in a way that parents who aren’t also preschool teachers have a hard time doing.

To this day, I credit her with the total ease with which my now 7-year-old makes new friends at school. He still wants to have more things than everyone else, but he is also flexible now, and knows he doesn’t always get what he wants. I also credit his teacher from his second year of preschool with his tolerance for smells and textures. He was a screamer at age two, and he couldn’t cope with rubber cement, or stickers, or felt, or buttons on his clothes. He still doesn’t like those things, and won’t voluntarily use stickers or wear anything but cotton t-shirts. But having the chance to spend the first half-hour of preschool every day either spreading shaving cream on a mirror, or working at the sensory table, or getting paint on his fingers, has taught him to cope. He hates the smell of rubber cement and Elmer’s, but he’ll glue in art class if he has to. And I credit the pre-K teacher who made the announcement about that awful letter with inspiring his interest in reading. When he was about to finish his second year of preschool, he had noticed that the pre-K class was reading a book on the first moon landing. He asked that teacher whether they could do the same thing the next year, when he would be in her class. She of course said yes, and one year later they completed a three-week unit on space that included a simulated moon landing, complete with oxygen masks made out of two-liter bottles. This June, he finished first grade, reading at fourth-grade level.

There is no way for kids who don’t get to go to good preschools to catch up with the ones who do. No matter the kid, no matter their background. A top-quality preschool is too enriching an environment to hold anyone back. Our preschool experience has made more of a difference to our kids’ development

than anything else, and it has meant the world to us as parents. We will never, ever forget how much our preschool meant to us. We are so fortunate to have been a part of it. If only every parent could be so lucky.

Sally Roever
Falls Church, Virginia

As a first grade teacher, I can immediately identify those students who had the opportunity to experience early intervention. During the course of a school year, these students excel at a faster rate and are able to better comprehend concepts and skills at a higher rate than students who did not get the experience. They score higher on assessments, are in a higher reading level, and are able to tackle more challenging concepts. They are better able to articulate and verbalize orally. The early programs make my job as a first grade teacher easier. I’m sure kindergarten teachers have the same perspective.

Carolyn Stephenson
Norfolk, Virginia

I am a special education teacher in K, 1st and 2nd grade. It is obvious when a child plays with other kids that they didn’t attend pre-school in the way they relate to other kids socially. This definitely holds them back from learning. They fall behind right at the start, not only socially but academically.

Ophelia Miciano
Norfolk, Virginia

My name is Heather Jelks and I’m a board member with The Child & Family Network Centers in Alexandria, VA. We provide a pre-school program for at-risk 4 year old children in our community as well as wrap-around social services for their families. Without our passionately committed teachers, administrators, volunteers and donors, many children who desperately need

quality pre-school would go without this vital program. When I visit the CFNC classrooms and see these children learning and socializing, I know just how important it is to give every child, regardless of circumstances, access to quality pre-school and caring, skillful teachers. These children are quick to offer a hug or a smile and show me what they've been learning. I feel so fortunate to be a part of an organization that won't rest until every needy child in Alexandria receives a quality pre-school education.

Heather Jelks
Alexandria, Virginia

When I worked in an Early Head Start Classroom, I saw how early detection of delays and beginning services early helped decrease these delays. As a Family Day-care provider, I saw again how early detection helped children to catch up with same age peers. Therapists were allowed in the home during hours of care and the family, therapist and I worked closely to create goals to help the children. The stress level on the family was decreased as they had an added level of support.

Michelle Jackson
Louisa, Virginia

Infant Toddler Family Day Care hears regular testimony from parents of the children enrolled in our family daycare homes. Last week a parent commented how as first-time parents their provider has "helped us better understand our baby's development, and she always has good advice to give." We were also told how another family's little boy learned many skills long before his peers in both center and home care through choosing their ITFDC provider. Lastly, another

When I worked in an Early Head Start Classroom, I saw how early detection of delays and beginning services early helped decrease these delays.

family has told us how without Infant Toddler Family Day Care her family never would have found our provider and that would have been such a terrible shame. It's a wonderful, community based program that I am deeply grateful for.

Wynne Busman
Fairfax, Virginia

As a pre-kindergarten teacher with Virginia's Preschool Initiative (VPI) program, I had so many great stories of success for both children and families! One of the most powerful stories begins with a home visit before school began. A very elderly grandmother was caring for an extremely energetic and courageous young man that I will call Derek. When I pulled into the gravel driveway several miles out of town one morning to meet these two, I saw a little boy jetting around a worn track on a full speed 4-wheeler. I went inside to meet a loving woman with limited mobility who was overwhelmed in caring for the little boy on the 4-wheeler, Derek. Derek had spent the first 18 months of his life in a playpen, alone, picked up only long enough to take a bottle and then promptly placed back into his pen. Often, Derek was left there while his mother went out for the evening with friends. Sometimes, he was watched by an older sibling or cousin. Derek's mother had stopped communication with her family and her neglect was eventually discovered by social services when some conscientious acquaintances reported that he was left home alone. That is when Derek's

grandmother was reconnected with him and stepped in and began caring for him. Heartbroken over his treatment and longing to form a relationship with him, she took him in and spoiled him as much as she was able to do. When I met Derek, he barely spoke. Most of his front teeth had been pulled due to severe decay. He had limited listening skills and a small vocabulary. His test scores for phonemic awareness, vocabulary, and social skills were off-the-charts low. Every month, we held parenting meetings and discussed proper care, nutrition, skills, and resources for the families in our program. We worked diligently to connect Derek and his grandmother to community services that would support their needs. We helped grandma find a good doctor and dentist to get Derek back into tip-top shape. At school, we supported Derek as he struggled to fit in, work with small groups, play with individuals, make friends, and develop conversational skills. We worked with him individually on vocabulary, counting, patterns, color recognition, and phonemic awareness. Slowly, but surely, Derek started catching on. Soon, he became eager to learn. He became a chatterbox and made good friends. At the end of his first school year, Derek had made phenomenal growth! His grandmother and I cried as we celebrated his successes and found hope in his long neglected strengths and playful personality. Derek continues to find success with teachers who care about him and understand his background. He missed out on the loving nurturing of a family for a large part of his his development. With persistence, effort, and love, Derek became a success story that we can all be grateful for.

Valarie Angle
Glade Hill, Virginia

As a first grade teacher, I can immediately identify those students who had the opportunity to experience early intervention. During the course of a school year, these students excel at a faster rate and are able to better comprehend concepts and skills at a higher rate than students who did not get the experience.

Washington

We are a childcare center and full day Head Start program. We serve primarily families who are at high risk. We serve homeless families and families with domestic violence. The children we care for would be spending their days in less than safe environments and very possibly not eating nutritiously if not in our care. Their parents are trying to get their lives back on track and count on us to care for their children so that they can go to school, attend drug and alcohol groups, domestic violence support groups, look for stable housing and/or go to work. I could give you several very specific stories about how children and families are supported through our program.

Shelley Hall
Auburn, Washington

Every month it is this ongoing back and forth between which bill to get put off so we can afford to keep our youngest son in his preschool class. And if we somehow get behind on the preschool tuition, we have to beg and plead with the director of the program to take partial payments so our son won't lose out on what is arguably the best part of his day. He's in Pre-K but he's already learning spelling, sentence construction, math, and reading concepts and these things wouldn't be possible without the quality preschool. And quality preschools cost money because they need to be able to attract the best teachers. The kind of teachers who are able to teach kids math, spelling, reading, at an age appropriate level. I know that when my son starts kindergarten, he will be fully ready to go and perhaps even ahead of some of his peers because of this preschool and that's due to the sacrifices that we're making now towards his education. I wouldn't trade this experience for anything and I just wish that more kids had the same opportunities my sons have been able to have.

Mindy Westerman
Bellevue, Washington

Every month it is this ongoing back and forth between which bill to get put off so we can afford to keep our youngest son in his preschool class.

When I was a new parent in 1979, my wife and I found child care for approximately (because I cannot remember exactly) for \$200-\$300 per month. Now, I am a grandparent, and my daughter and her husband pay at least five times that amount. It is excruciating to see this difference over a generation. Incomes have not kept up with this over the same period of time.

Robert Brown
Fircrest, Washington

I am employed full time and have four children- that's going to be four kids I will have paid to put through child care, and all day kindergarten. The fact that I earn a good wage means that I don't qualify for any type of assistance. However, I don't receive child support and most of my income goes into child care. I can speak to the importance of preschool in being ready for kindergarten, and the importance of quality preschool/child care for allowing me to work. Thus, not paying for preschool is not an option for me. But paying for preschool means that am unable to save for retirement like my peers and I am unable to save for a rainy day. I carry more debt than my peers and I am vulnerable to rising costs of staple goods or to an emergency. But my child can't afford to miss high quality preschool, and it is a sacrifice that I am willing to make to assure her a good start in life. I just wonder... why does it have to be this hard?

Sarah Pulliam
Lake Forest Park, Washington

When I first became a single mother in 2009 and began searching for childcare providers and centers I was shocked to find that adequate child care was nearly as much as my rent each month. I was lucky to find a more affordable option through a family friend and when that ended, to learn that my employer offers a discount with many local providers. I've struggled to make ends meet even though I consider myself one of the 'lucky ones' who works for an amazing company with great benefits. I don't know how others do it. We need to have more quality and affordable child care options for single parents and working families so they can make ends meet and provide for themselves. Its shocking to read that child care in the Washington costs as much as university.

Alicia Mains
Redmond, Washington

I am a physician and mother of two amazing kids. Like most women, I had tough choices to make about timing kids and work. I chose to have both my kids during my medical training (residency), a time during which I worked long hours for modest pay. We were fortunate to find an amazing childcare center near our house, and both our kids started as young infants. We were also fortunate that we could afford to risk going into debt to pay for childcare, since we could expect my salary to jump when I finished training. We paid roughly \$2400/month when both our kids were in childcare, a staggering sum that was more than our mortgage and comparable to a college education. But families have years to prepare to pay for college. How are young families with low salaries and no assets supposed to do it? Living on one salary is no picnic either, and would have significantly damaged both of our careers. So we took a deep breath and survived somehow. We realize how blessed we have been by the quality of our kids childcare and by the fact that we could weather the financial storm. But we need a better solution, one that works for all families.

Kerstin Edlefsen
Seattle, Washington

When my son was 4 years old, I needed to find quality childcare that I could afford. Because of my income level the state subsidized the cost of preschool. I had to pay only \$50/month, which increased somewhat once I found a steady job. I am thankful to the state of Washington for helping me. Still, I think that the costs associated with preschool are outrageous. There should be universal childcare.

Elena Rumiantseva
Seattle, Washington

As a first time mom who works full time and lives in Seattle, we had to spend months looking for high quality and affordable child care here. Let me just say that high quality and affordable do not exist together. The place with the minimum quality that I would accept for my child still costs \$1200 per month! The average place we looked at cost between \$1500-2000. per month. And there was a long waiting list to get in. Almost every place said that the waiting list for the infant room was a year to six months long. I don't know how you're supposed to get on a list for infant care one year before your child is born! We will end up paying more in childcare than we pay for our mortgage, and likely need to go into debt. This is tough when you're still young in your career.

Robin Barr
Seattle, Washington

I started my teaching career as a Head Start teacher and can testify to the dramatic emotional, social and academic growth these children make as a result of their participation in Head Start. As a current educator in a public elementary school, I see children who arrive at school with no previous formal preschool experiences and these children lose valuable learning time adjusting to the school environment. Head Start is invaluable in preparing children for more formal school experiences. Educating our children should be the number one priority of this country - cutting Head

Start programs will not prepare our children for their future roles as citizens of this nation. The cuts we make now will cost us greater in the long term, as we spend more to remediate students in college, house them in our prisons and pay for their upkeep through the welfare programs.

Roxanne Nalumisa
Washington

I am sickened by the news that government-funded early education programs are being cut. I am a public school kindergarten teacher in Seattle, WA, and when I think about the positive effects of Head Start, I always think about a Latino family whose two children I have had in kindergarten over the last 6 years. They are a low income family whose primary language is Spanish. Kids in this demographic would typically enter school far less prepared than the kids of parents who had a higher income and education level, but these two kids had each attended 3 years of Head Start, and they entered kindergarten with the skills and confidence to easily meet the standards and excel throughout their elementary years. Government-funded early education can truly help make education the great equalizer in our country, so it needs to be expanded, not reduced.

Carlen Luke
Seattle, Washington

West Virginia

I owe a debt of gratitude to my mother for my children's early start in their education experience. If early child education had been funded when my children were young, this responsibility would not have fallen on her.

Beth Kitzmiller
Summersville, West Virginia

The evidence is in my grandchild that I used to call "Monster Boy." After his pre-school teacher spent time with him and continually encouraged him he became the charming youngster he was meant to be. His teacher said he is that child everyone wishes that they had. He is a very creative individual with oodles of charm.

Christy Gill
Fayetteville, West Virginia

WV has seen the importance of early education for years. I work across the hall from our Pre-K teachers and the work they do is amazing. Young children are so ready to learn. Recent studies I have read show that one of the best ways to close the achievement gap is through early intervention and vocabulary development. Pre-K programs are an excellent way to help close the gap!

Angie Turkelson
St. Albans, West Virginia

My youngest son was diagnosed with Autism when he was only 2 years old. He needed a lot of schooling to start to talk. He also is getting better now that he is almost seven years old. He spent 2 and 1/2 years in specialized preschool in West Virginia. Now he is one of the smartest kid in his class and he is going on to first grade. I am very very proud of him for his accomplishment.

Katrina Sizemore
Hansford, West Virginia

My daughter's name is Emma and she is now five years old. We started birth to three when she was about 6 months old and she's continued until she aged out. Having that support system and someone to talk to made a huge difference in our lives. And then we moved on to outpatient therapy and she also receives therapy at preschool. Just having these people in our lives helped to improve Emma's quality of life. But to help teach us how to do what's best for her and us as a family. We have grown to love all of these people.

Amanda Hightower
West Hamlin, West Virginia



Wisconsin

As a former Head Start Teacher, I was able to impact countless families and children. Giving them a chance to get ahead before Kindergarten and providing support to the parents. I saw a past parent and student the other day and the mom thanked me again for everything I did, she deserved the thank you for getting her daughter in the program, I love Head Start!

Meghan Marthaler
Superior, Wisconsin

As a mother of 7 children in public education and a teacher of first grade children, I ask that you support educators in their training and profession to support all learners in their community. Our job is demanding and we need support to ensure children get off on the right foot in their education. They are our future!

Jennifer Bjork
Superior, Wisconsin

I am a 30+ year early childhood professional, currently working as a family child care provider, so I have stories galore. I want to tell the story of how I became an advocate for worthy wages for the early childhood profession. I started my career in the 1970's when people like me believed we could change the world and the way to do that was to start with the children. We could provide programs for children where ALL children – regardless of race, class, gender, etc. could realize their full potential, live by democratic principles, etc. But it soon became apparent that it's hard to nurture others to be their best selves when we are oppressed as a workforce, so I worked and I became an advocate for WORTHY WAGES for the child care workforce, a torch I carry to this day. I believe that I make a difference every day for children, but quality care depends on a quality workforce. Investing in the professional development, wages, and working conditions is an investment in early childhood education!

Peggy Haack
Madison, Wisconsin

I am neither an educator nor a parent, but I can tell you that having learned to read at 4 years old set me on a path to success that someone of my family's income level normally doesn't achieve. By 10 years old, I was in an accelerated learning program. I cruised through high school and was accepted to the University of my choice. I had a successful career and retired at age 56. The earlier a student learns to read, the more likely he or she will achieve success. Reading opens doors to different interests and paths. It develops imagination and curiosity which can last a lifetime and help us to see outside the box, develop new technologies and envision a better future for our world. Please remember that children are our future. Let's help them improve our world.

Juli Bauer
Shorewood, Wisconsin

It seems so obvious to me to start in the beginning. Instead of cleaning up and fixing problems, do everything in one's power to prevent them. Make sure people are healthy and educated... but even better yet, make sure children are!! I was a single mother who returned to college, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and was able to bring my pre-K daughter to the campus where they had amazing, well-staffed childcare. It felt great to go to class and know that she was learning and having fun as well. I was always scrapping together cleaning jobs and waitressing jobs...the assistance for childcare made all the difference. A little help in the beginning, and now we are both independent, strong, able women. So proud of my daughter for being on the Dean's list at UW-Madison, and perhaps proud of myself for showing her how to seek knowledge. Thanks for helping one of your taxpayers out!

Lani Tarantino
Grafton, Wisconsin

When I first started, my child had been diagnosed with a speech delay. She wasn't talking, trying to read or write. She was put in a K-3 special education class. She didn't want to make friends or participate in class. I found out about the HIPPY Program off a flyer in the hallway of her school. Three years later, my child is outgoing, she is a VERY talkative 6-year-old, she is getting good grades in school and she loves homework.

Anonymous
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Three years ago, our district began Pre K. I had a student who began by hiding under tables, crying on and off and not talking. By the end of Pre K he was playing with friends, writing his name, being part of the classroom and enjoying who he was as a learner and person. During the year, it was determined he was on the autism spectrum. The early interventions made him successful in Kindergarten the following year.

Nicole Zeroth
Wisconsin

My daughter attended Head Start, so I was able to see first-hand how Head Start actually teaches children how to learn, and how to use their knowledge to make sound decisions. I saw the power of what my daughter learned from Head Start throughout her school years. She excelled in school, and earned enough scholarships to move on to college, and on to a good career. She's now married, with two children and a home of their own. And again, every step of the way, I saw the influence of Head Start in the way she approached challenges, whether academic challenges or ordinary life challenges. I understood how important early education is to later success in school and ultimately, to the nation's ability to compete adequately in the modern world market.

Diane Fabian
Wisconsin

The Oneida Early Head Start program had a very young mom enter the program. She was homeless at the time, living with various relatives with her 14 month old. At her first Home Visit she stated she was so overwhelmed and did not know what she wanted to do with her life. The mother built a strong relationship with her Home Visitor who worked with her on goal setting and finding resources. When this same mother left the program she was employed, lived on her own, and had her own vehicle for the first time in her life. She has built such a strong and loving relationship with her daughter now that all of the extra stressors are out of her life. Early Head Start makes powerful changes in the lives of so many families.

Joan Christnot
Green Bay, Wisconsin

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Wyoming

Both my grandsons went to Project Reach, an organization which works with kids who are challenged in some way. The oldest had a speech problem, the younger was afraid of groups of people and panicked in a classroom setting. The oldest is now in 6th grade and has been on the honor roll many times. The younger is in kindergarden and thriving, way ahead of some of his peers. I give all credit to Project Reach for the nurturing environment and one on one attention. I see LOTS of other kids who have been helped so much. We need to keep funding these programs so as to get our kids on the path to learning. Thanks to the teachers, helpers and pathologists who were/are involved!!!! Pre-school rocks and ALL kids should have the chance to go!!

Wendy Colschen
Rawlins, Wyoming

Working in early childhood education I have first hand experience with young parents who try to do the best for their children. When a parent earns minimum wage and has long hours, a good day care center with well qualified professional staff who earns a livable wage and can offer counseling and child rearing advise means all the difference to these fragile families. Here in Buffalo, Wyoming money is being spent on a new jail, remodeling and enlarging the senior center, but the day care center struggles along with bake sales, bazaars, and raffles for needed funds. Parents struggle to pay all the fees themselves. There is a huge waiting list. The staff barely earns minimum wage and must rely on their other family members for living expenses in their own homes. Numerous studies have shown that early enrichment and care and guidance for the young child and his/her parents show great dividends in family stability, higher test scores and mental health.

Joanna Taylor
Buffalo, Wyoming

Business Leaders

Business leaders have an acute understanding of the importance of an educated workforce to support a strong economy, keep America competitive globally, and ensure a vibrant democracy. High-quality child care and early education builds a strong foundation of cognitive and social skills in young children that can improve their engagement in school and increase earnings and economic development. This is especially important for the growing proportion—almost half— of American young children currently living in deprivation and poverty. Investing in early learning and development is the best foundation for human capital. Research has shown that high-quality early childhood programs—including home visiting and early childhood education—have both immediate and long-term benefits to not only the individual child, but also for our larger society. Following are the words and stories of the Committee for Economic Development’s business leader members who believe strongly in this investment:

Fundamental to what it means to be an American is the thought that children, regardless of the circumstances into which they’re born, have the opportunity to reach whatever heights to which they may aspire. When at-risk children are prepared for school they are more likely to graduate, obtain meaningful jobs and make valuable contributions to their communities. Quality, early childhood education is the key to their social and economic mobility.

James E. Rohr

**Executive Chairman and former Chief Executive Officer, The PNC Financial Services Group
Trustee, Committee for Economic Development
Pennsylvania**

Our economy faces new challenges from globalization, population aging, and borrow-and-consume exhaustion. We can address all three challenges by making sure every one of our children becomes a capable young adult – healthy, educated, free, secure, and a good citizen.

Robert H. Dugger

**Founder and Managing Partner,
Hanover Investment Group, LLC
Trustee, Committee for Economic Development
Virginia**

Last Spring, David Duarte’s name appeared on the 7th grade Honor Roll at White Station Middle School in Memphis, TN. He earned the distinction by really hard work, good teachers, and months and months of remedial effort with tutors. When David and his two brothers, Rogelio and Jonathan, joined our family after their mother’s death, David, a fifth grader, could barely read a sentence. He had not learned to read in early childhood and struggled to read to learn thereafter.

The Duarte boys’ mom was diagnosed with cancer three years prior. As her health declined she could not help David and support his early elementary education. Living in a single-parent Latino home with a gravely ill parent and limited resources, his foundations for academic success were weakened. As her health and resources faded she simply could not provide for David.

Recently, David started the eighth grade with a big smile on his face, talking non-stop, and looking forward to trying out for basketball. He is an emerging success story. How many Davids are out there in under-resourced homes with economic and social challenges, that could become honor roll students if there were programmatic diagnostics, interventions, and/or better early childhood developmental programs?

Larry Jensen

**President/ CEO
Cushman & Wakefield/ Commercial Advisors
Trustee, Committee for Economic Development
Tennessee**