

A Case for Early Childhood Education

Early Childhood Education Works!

- For every **\$1 invested** in quality early education programming, **\$8 is saved** later in costs
- Studies show that **optimal learning** occurs when the child is taught with the same language and methodology in school that teachers use to train their parents and family members.
- Communication between teacher and parent becomes open, and a **partnership** is established.
- **Children's brains:** 75-80% the size of an adult brain by age 3 and 90% by age 5. Neural pathways are established when stimulated educationally in very young brains.
- Sound **social-emotional development** is an **essential factor** in all areas of child development (cognitive, physical, social, language) and new learning.
- Children who do not develop **self-regulation** by age 5 have difficulty with listening, focusing attention, controlling their emotions, and acting-out (tantrums) when they are expected to follow directions or a learning protocol.
- Hart and Risley: by age 3 a **30-million-word gap** develops in children from low-income families
- Parents in poverty could communicate more frequently, more positively, and in more diverse ways (meals, play, bedtime, etc.) as part of the **parent involvement** portion of their child's school.

The Need for Pre-School is Great!

- 59-78% of Houston's students enter kindergarten **not ready** with sound learning/study habits (listening, following directions, etc.)
- These effects occur in the present and continue to create **future problems**:
 - 17% fewer graduate high school
 - 20% fewer earn more than the poverty level of \$24,000
 - 19% more are arrested by age 40
- Of the 553,000 + **children under age five** in the Houston area:
 - 74 % live in poverty
 - 57% are cared for by non-parent adults
 - 75% are in unregulated "informal care" environments
 - Only 35% are enrolled in quality child care, Head Start and Pre-kindergarten programs
- Only 4 % of Houston's **child care facilities** are nationally accredited.
- The **teacher-child ratio** in Texas pre-kindergarten classes is **1 to 22** (national average: 1 to 10)
- Texas ranks 42nd in spending per student, 47th in SAT scores, and 50th in percentage of HS graduates.
- Only 18 % of children in Harris County are eligible for **Head Start**
- Only 50 % of these students receive a needed **childcare subsidy**.
- 51% of Houston area students graduate within four years of high school
 - Only 20% achieve some post high school training or educational credential
 - 75% of Texas prisoners are high school dropouts.

**The mission of Generation One is to physically and spiritually rebuild the
Third Ward by coordinating volunteer skills, talents, and resources.**

- 155 HISD pre-kindergarten classes → 3410 students are served
- A **small percentage** of the more than 400,000 Houston-area **children in poverty**
- **State programs** serve only **children with disabilities**.

What is the Solution for Texas Preschoolers?

- **Quality early education** for all students in poverty and otherwise at risk.
- **Significant readiness gains** at kindergarten.
- Increased levels of **reading mastery** at third grade.
- **Higher SAT scores** at high school graduation.
- Increased mastery of educational and **training** at the post-secondary level by all students.
- Not only monetary savings, but the **humanitarian benefits** to children and their families.
- The **improved standings and rank** of Texas and U.S. students: an infectious source of pride.
- Boost to the **work ethic** of young Americans.

Characteristics of Early Intervention Programs

- Opportunities should be accessible to as wide a range of children and their families as possible.
- Interventions should feature simultaneous two-generation approaches with strategies to train the preschoolers at their optimum learning time and simultaneous strategies to increase parent/guardian involvement
- Social-Emotional Learning should be the key focus in early intervention programs for children and be initiated as soon as possible after birth.
- Limiting factors to be addressed:
 - Inflexible and unpredictable jobs that do not pay enough to support a family
 - Lack of access to high quality, flexible and reliable early childcare and education
 - Toxic stress at home :
 - 14% report barriers to consistent employment
 - 43% are funded solely by full-time poverty-level employment and supported by unreliable child care
 - 35% have children at risk for developmental delays
 - Higher levels of chronic toxic stress which manifests as depression, anxiety, substance abuse, domestic violence and poor –fair mental health status.
- Early intervention programs often operate in isolation from one another and tend to focus on only one generation (the child or the parents)
- 25% of U.S. college students are parents, almost one-half of whom are single, yet they are supported by very few child care options.

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Components of Effective Early Childhood Programs

Key components:

1. Provide parents with multiple pathways to **financial stability** and family-supporting jobs
2. Families must be able to **access state and federal programs** without reduction of funds for which they are already eligible and are receiving when new programs are initiated.
3. Ensure access to **high-quality early childhood education** and enriching elementary school experiences.
4. Equip parents to better support their children's social and emotional learning and to advocate for their child's education.
5. A positive parent-child relationship and sound physical and mental health of parents are anchors for meeting child needs
6. Opening "**one-stop centers**" for child and family services and adopting a "**no wrong door approach**"
7. Create **partnerships** to build two-generation approaches to serve as platforms that offer opportunities to meet the needs of children and their parents simultaneously, including:
 - a) Schools with **early education programs** for children and **adult programs** for parents
 - b) **Home visiting programs** with employment and financial coaching components
 - c) **Job training programs**/community colleges with access to employment, high-quality child care, and financial coaching.

Summary

1. Parents should have authentic **opportunities to voice their concerns** and serve as experts about their children's needs.
2. The **effects of poverty** must be recognized and addressed.
3. **Collaboration** of community, government, business, and faith-based program providers with the families is critical.
4. Create **policies** that equip parents and children with the income, tools, and skills they need.
5. Put **common sense** into common practice by structuring public systems to respond to the realities.
6. Use **existing child, adult, and neighborhood programs and platforms** to build evidence for practical pathways out of poverty for entire families.
7. 17 million young children in low-income families → Tomorrow's parents, employees, and leaders.
8. Action in preschool intervention is prudent.
9. Financial and policy support provided today will result in more families reaching greater potential, becoming positive contributors to U.S. society, building their own strong, stable families and communities, building up the U.S. economy, and improving the U.S. presence as a world leader.

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