Early Childhood Education -
What we should do and why

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Why do early childhood programs matter?

- The 60 months from birth through age four is the most critical period of human development
- “It’s easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.”
  ~Frederick Douglass
A lot of US children are living in poverty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>39%</td>
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<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>37%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more races</td>
<td>23%</td>
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<tr>
<td>National average</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White/non-Hispanic</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
K-12 schools are failing to move disadvantaged children ahead

- Three-quarters of low-income 4th graders are below proficient in reading and math
- Four of five African-American 4th graders are below proficient in reading and math
- Less than 40% of high school seniors scored at college- and career-ready levels on the 2015 NAEP exam
- Only 5% of African-American students who took the ACT exam in 2013 were ready for college
Inflation-adjusted federal K-12 spending per pupil and achievement of 17-year-olds (% change from 1970-2010)
Growing research shows that gaps emerge very early in life

- Gaps between advantaged and disadvantaged children begin emerging as early as 9 months of age.
- By 18 months, toddlers from low-income families can already be several months behind in language development.
- By age three, children with college-educated parents have vocabularies as much as three times larger than those whose parents did not complete high school.
- Gaps continue to widen, leaving disadvantaged children up to two years behind by age five.
A lot of excitement around early childhood education

- Bipartisan enthusiasm
- New technology
- Pre-K expansion
Brain science underscores that we should focus much earlier
Early experiences build brains

• Brains aren’t born—they’re built through children’s early experiences

• Emotional, social, and cognitive development are interconnected and interdependent

• Development is cumulative
Critical period for physical, linguistic, and cognitive development

- **Language/speech** (symbols, ideas, social relationships)
- **Seeing/hearing/touch**
- **Higher cognitive functions** (reading, mathematics, critical thinking)

**SOURCE:** US National Research Council & Institute of Medicine

Age 4
Critical period for development of “Executive Function” (behavior and emotional control)
How does healthy learning and development occur?

• Secure relationship with at least one caring, responsive, adult

• Social, emotional, and cognitive development is driven by ongoing, language-rich interaction with adults

• From birth, children’s positive, back-and-forth interactions with their caregivers literally build the architecture of the developing brain

• In the absence of these interactions, children’s brains cannot develop properly
Every environment is a learning environment for very young children.
Where are children learning?

• Very young children are continuously learning—wherever they are, from whomever they’re with

• Common distinction between “childcare” and “preschool” is false

• The key is the quality of children’s ongoing interactions with caring adults
The landscape of early childhood learning and development
We have an extraordinary opportunity to get this right

• We’re building local, state, and federal early childhood systems from the ground up

• Use the science of early brain development to inform system design
The bottom line for policy

• We have to think beyond school: *Children are facing a life gap, not an achievement gap*

• For the most disadvantaged children, nine months of pre-K at age 4 is too little too late

• Policy must focus on where children are in their crucial earliest years
  • Home
  • Child care
Child care is our nation’s most important early education program.
Herbert Hoover, November 19, 1930: Address to the White House Conference on Child Health and Protection

We aim “to set [children’s] feet upon surer paths to health and well-being and happiness…

…Let no one believe that these are questions which should not stir a nation; that they are below the dignity of statesmen or governments. If we could have but one generation of properly born, trained, educated, and healthy children, a thousand other problems of government would vanish.”
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