

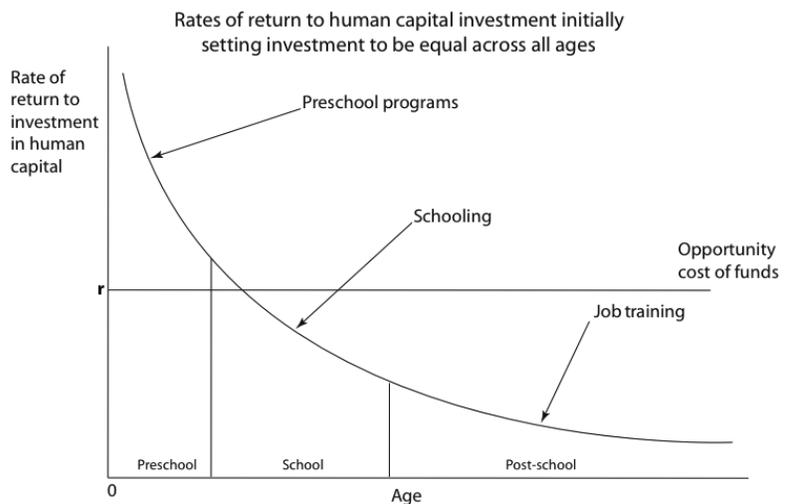


THE KINDERGARTEN READINESS GAP

The United States faces a devastating kindergarten readiness gap. By the time children enter kindergarten, the gap in academic achievement between children from low-income neighborhoods and their more affluent peers is large,¹ and this gap continues to widen over time.

A SMART INVESTMENT

When children are equipped with the skills, knowledge, and support necessary to thrive in kindergarten, they are on the right path to school success and life-long productivity. High-quality early education and care produces a return of 7-10% in education, social, health and economic outcomes.² Over the lifetime of the child, “each dollar invested returns 60—300 dollars...through a reduced burden on the schools in remediation, through a reduced burden on the criminal justice system and through enhanced college attendance and workforce productivity.”³



Heckman, J. J. (2008), The Case for Investing in Disadvantaged Young Children, CESifo DICE Report.

ABOUT JUMPSTART

Jumpstart is a national early education organization working toward the day every child in America enters kindergarten prepared to succeed. For 20 years, Jumpstart has recruited and trained college students and community Corps members to serve preschool children in low-income neighborhoods. Jumpstart’s proven curriculum helps children develop the language and literacy skills they need to be ready for school, setting them on a path to close the readiness gap before it is too late. Jumpstart is a proud member of the AmeriCorps national service network. Learn more at www.jstart.org.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Jumpstart calls upon policy makers to help close the readiness gap and to work together to create a nation where every child enters kindergarten prepared to succeed. Policy decisions should reflect all of the following recommendations: ensure high-quality, support first class educators, provide meaningful access, and leverage community-based solutions.



1. Ensure High-Quality Early Education and Care

Systems and resources must be created to ensure and support high-quality programs known to meet children’s individual physical, social and cognitive needs. State agencies and programs responsible for early education and care must establish readiness standards associated with education, health, nutrition and other measures, and hold programs accountable to these standards.

Implementation of these standards requires substantial funding for the agencies that oversee them. On-going monitoring and support of programs is necessary. For these programs to achieve higher levels of quality, support in terms of funding and other resources must be provided as well.

Meaning of High-Quality

High-quality early education and care programs include those that:

- Utilize developmentally, culturally and linguistically appropriate, research-based curricula focused on key outcomes for children
- Achieve meaningful outcomes for children as measured by consistent assessments and evaluation
- Base materials, curricula, instruction, assessments and evaluation on the latest early childhood knowledge and research
- Ensure low child-adult ratios and meaningful adult-child interactions with intentionally rich and active experiences
- Support young children’s physical, social and cognitive development
- Help children engage in and learn through their environments
- Involve parents and families in opportunities to help meet their children’s needs



2. Support First Class Educators

Well-trained and prepared educators are the foundation of high-quality early education and care. Educators must have ample time to plan, review and implement high-quality curricula to ensure intentional practice in the classroom throughout the day. Educators and leaders must be offered on-going and well-designed continuing education and professional development opportunities, as well as access to the latest research, to stay up-to-date with current trends and effective practice in the field relevant to the ages and needs of young children that they are serving.

Future educators must be exposed to relevant courses and professional development that reflect current research and expose students to developmentally, culturally and linguistically appropriate practice. They should also engage in rigorous contextualized field experiences that include training and classroom experience.

To attract and retain strong early educators and leaders, compensation must be reflective of their training, education and experience. Incentives, including student loan forgiveness, tuition remission and leadership development, should be provided to attract and retain strong professionals to enter and lead in the field.

Jumpstart Corps Members: Future Educators and Leaders

Jumpstart’s training for college students and community members (Corps members) provides practice on strategies to effectively support children’s language and literacy skills as well as social-emotional development. Corps members gain an understanding of how young children think and learn, how to create a supportive learning environment and how to engage children in positive learning experiences.



3. Provide Meaningful Access

Providing easily accessible and affordable programs and services better enables families to participate and enroll their children in high-quality programs. While policy should reflect a commitment to universal access, at a minimum, families with lower incomes should be able to receive financial assistance for their children to attend and benefit from such programs.

Families must have options from which to choose. Information about the variety and quality of programs must be publicly available to support families making informed decisions for their children.

For families to easily access these programs, the multiple services and resources that may be available must be coordinated and streamlined. Such programs must be available in all communities and located within a reasonable distance of families’ homes and workplaces. Additional funding is critical to expand and scale innovative programs known to provide high-quality early education and care that meet children’s needs.



4. Leverage Community-Based Solutions

Communities are rich with untapped resources to help young children succeed. Community-based and private organizations play a critical role in mobilizing local resources and can provide community members—from college students to older adults—opportunities to serve in classrooms. Trained volunteers can assist in the cognitive and social development of young children, lower the child-adult ratio in classrooms, and help young children develop strong connections with caring adults. Further support and funding for evidence-based and effective community-based partnerships is important, and programs such as Federal Work-Study, AmeriCorps and Foster Grandparents help the public and private sectors work together to close the kindergarten readiness gap.

In communities, early educators, leaders, and programs must coordinate with superintendents, principals, as well as educators at the elementary and secondary school levels. Collaboration and planning with early education and care programs within and outside of the school district is vital for the creation of a coordinated continuum of educational opportunities meeting the needs of children starting in their early years and extending throughout their schooling.

JUMPSTART'S PROGRAM

Jumpstart's curriculum was developed from research-based instructional strategies that have been shown to improve children's kindergarten readiness skills.

Jumpstart intentionally focuses on key aspects of language and literacy development, including oral language, books and print knowledge, and phonological awareness. At the same time, Jumpstart supports young children's social-emotional development. Jumpstart Corps members help young children become engaged and invested learners who take pride in their work, respond positively to adults, and remain motivated to overcome challenges and setbacks. Jumpstart helps deepen children's learning and extends learning in other contexts including their homes and communities.

Jumpstart is committed to strong outcomes for children and Corps members. Annual evaluation practices include pre- and post-literacy and language assessments to examine child gains over the course of the program. Corps member impacts are measured three times per year by a survey investigating civic engagement, workforce preparedness, and knowledge of early childhood practices. Finally, Jumpstart leads a research initiative with higher education institutions and faculty to conduct independent validation studies of Jumpstart's program. These results are shared with stakeholders and program staff to inform program improvement and ensure Jumpstart is preparing young children for kindergarten.



TO LEARN MORE ABOUT JUMPSTART

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¹ National School Readiness Indicators Initiative (2005). Getting Ready: Findings from the national school readiness indicators initiative – A 17 state partnership, p. 7.

² Heckman, J. (2011, September 21). Letter to Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction. Retrieved from <http://www.heckmanequation.org/content/resource/letter-joint-select-committee-deficit-reduction>.

³ *Ibid.*