

## A Clear and Compelling Case for Action

Achievement gap. Drop-out rates. College and career readiness. STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math). These are the priorities on many education agendas. Addressing these issues begins with children's earliest years and includes social-emotional and cognitive development. It includes an early benchmark that strongly predicts children's chances of success in school and in life: the ability to read proficiently by the end of third grade.

Reading is the basis of learning in all subjects. Yet 43% of Massachusetts third graders -- including 65% of children from low-income families -- do not read proficiently.<sup>1</sup> The path to turning this around begins at birth and includes high-quality early education and care.

At Strategies for Children, Inc., research guides our work as we seek to ensure that children in Massachusetts have access to high-quality early education and become proficient readers by the end of third grade. Preventing problems now, rather than remediating them later, is a cost-effective investment that benefits children and taxpayers alike.

### Early Indicators

- In the first few years of life, a young child's brain creates 700 neural connections a second.<sup>2</sup>
- Disparities in children's cognitive, social, behavioral and health outcomes are evident at 9 months and larger at 24 months.<sup>3</sup>
- By age 3, children from low-income families have vocabularies that, on average, are half the size of more affluent peers.<sup>4</sup>
- Children's vocabulary in kindergarten correlates strongly with their reading ability in high school.<sup>5</sup>
- Children who struggle with reading in third grade are four times less likely to finish high school by 19 than other children.<sup>6</sup>

### Educational Benefits of High-Quality Early Education and Care

- Low-income children who attended high-quality preschool programs are 40% less likely to need special education services or be kept back a grade, 30% more likely to finish high school and twice as likely to attend college.<sup>7,8</sup>
- Children who attended high-quality early education programs score higher on school readiness assessments, have stronger early literacy and numeracy skills, and exhibit fewer behavioral problems in school.<sup>9</sup>

### Economic Benefits of High-Quality Early Education and Care

- Nobel laureate James Heckman and other leading economists estimate that investments in high-quality early education yield a 10-16% rate of return, outpacing the average return of the stock market since World War II.<sup>10</sup>
- Children who participated in high-quality early education programs become more employable workers, strengthening the state and federal tax bases.<sup>11</sup>
- Low-income children who attended a high-quality early education program earn \$548 more a month at age 40 than non-participants.<sup>12</sup>
- Parents with reliable early education and care for their children have less turnover and lower absenteeism. Absenteeism due to discontinuity of child care costs U.S. businesses an estimated \$3 billion per year.<sup>13</sup>

### Health Benefits of High-Quality Early Education and Care

- Children who attended high-quality early education programs are more likely as adults to have health insurance and proactively seek medical treatment. They have been found less likely to experience signs and symptoms of cardiovascular and metabolic diseases in their mid-30s.<sup>14</sup>
- Children who attended high-quality early education programs are less likely to smoke, use drugs or abuse alcohol, and more likely to wear seat belts. Girls who attended a high-quality early education program are less likely to become teenage mothers.<sup>15</sup>

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