The Investor’s Case: Early Education

What Science and Research Tell Us...

- From birth to 5, a child’s brain experiences its most dramatic growth, laying a sturdy or shaky foundation for all future cognitive and social-emotional development.
- Through the process of epigenetics, children’s early experiences literally guide their gene expression, determining which neural pathways are strengthened and skills are honed.
- Nevertheless, only 2 in 10 children have access to a high-quality early education setting that optimizes their foundational learning. More than 2.5 million 4 years olds lack access to publicly funded preschool entirely.
- This crisis in access and quality is reinforced by early educators’ abysmal compensation and workforce development, fueling absenteeism and turnover.

Why It Matters...

- A typical low-income 5 year old enters kindergarten more than a year behind his/her higher-income classmates in language and literacy skills.
- Over time, these gaps not only widen but harden, setting children on divergent paths. Children with low school readiness are less successful in grade school and more likely to dropout of high school than their better-prepared peers.
- High-quality preschool programs for 3 and 4 year olds deliver a 7-10% return on investment (ROI). “Fade out” is a myth; although cognitive skills taper in the short term, there are long-term benefits via reduced grade repetition and special education and improved social-emotional skills, health outcomes, and lifelong earnings.
- These gains are particularly pronounced for the most vulnerable children, including those from low-income and/or immigrant backgrounds. By improving social mobility, these benefits also extend to future generations, underscoring early education as an powerful way to disrupt intergenerational poverty.

What “Good” Would Look Like...

- All children must have access to high-quality, affordable, equitable early education environments. Key pillars of such settings include:
  - Early learning standards and curricula that address the whole child;
  - Well-prepared teachers that receive ongoing support;
  - Classroom environments that foster learning; are small; support students with unique needs; and ensure positive experiences for diverse children;
  - Meaningful family engagement; and
  - Robust program assessments and quality rating and improvement systems

Strategies for Scaled Impact....

- Improved training, professional development, and pay for early educators, including tech-enabled on-the-job coaching and supports
- Replication and expansion of promising local- and state-level innovations in universal pre-K, leveraging lessons learned and local insights
- Advocacy for increased local, state, and federal funding and use of innovative public-private financing mechanisms to promote affordability
Dig Deeper: Early Education

Key Terms
- **Epigenetics**: how environmental influences (relationships and experiences) affect gene expression
- **Kindergarten readiness**: a composite measure encompassing early math and reading skills, attention, problem behaviors, and physical health at kindergarten entry
- **Whole child education**: approaches emphasize students’ long-term, holistic cognitive, social, and emotional growth, rather than narrowly defined academic achievement

Key Research Studies
- How preschool teachers’ preparation and qualifications affect student outcomes
- America’s low rates of early childhood investment and preschool enrollment relative to other developed nations
- Maximizing the long-term benefits of preschool through enhanced quality

Field Leaders
- **Head Start** promotes local school readiness through local community agencies nationwide
- **Acelero Learning** operates and supports innovative Head Start programs across the country
- **NAEYC** and **Erikson** connect research, practice, and policy to promote high-quality early learning
- **CAP Tulsa** and **Ounce of Prevention’s** holistic two-generation approaches bolster kindergarten readiness for disadvantaged families

Promising Innovators
- **Waterford UPSTART** blends parent coaching and early learning software to engage families beyond the preK classroom
- **Wildflower** supports a diverse national network of Montessori micro-schools
- **The Primary School** integrates education, health care, and family supports beginning at birth
- Visit our Venture Index for more innovators in this space!

Key Funders
- **William Penn Foundation**
- **Omidyar Network**
- **Buffett Early Childhood Fund**
- **Office of Head Start**
- **Institute for Education Sciences**
- To learn more, check out this national database of early education funders!

Sample Metrics & Tools
- **METRICS**
  - Stimulating language use & materials
  - Staff–child & child–child interactions
  - Personal care and safety routines
  - Provisions for professional needs & development of staff
- **ASSESSMENT TOOLS**
  - Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-R)
  - Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS™)

Want to learn more? Check out Promise’s full resource library!
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