



Boosting Washington's Economy

Short- and Long-Term Economic Gains
through Quality Early Learning

A report by:  **AMERICA'S EDGE**
Strengthening Businesses Through Proven Investments in Kids



Acknowledgements

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Who We Are

The business leaders of AMERICA'S EDGE take a critical look at the knowledge, skills and abilities businesses need their employees to have in the 21st century, including the ability to be communicators, collaborators and critical thinkers. Using that analysis, we educate policymakers and the public about high-quality, proven investments that strengthen businesses, establish a foundation for sustained economic growth, and protect America's competitive edge in a global marketplace, while helping our nation's children get on the right track.

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Executive Summary

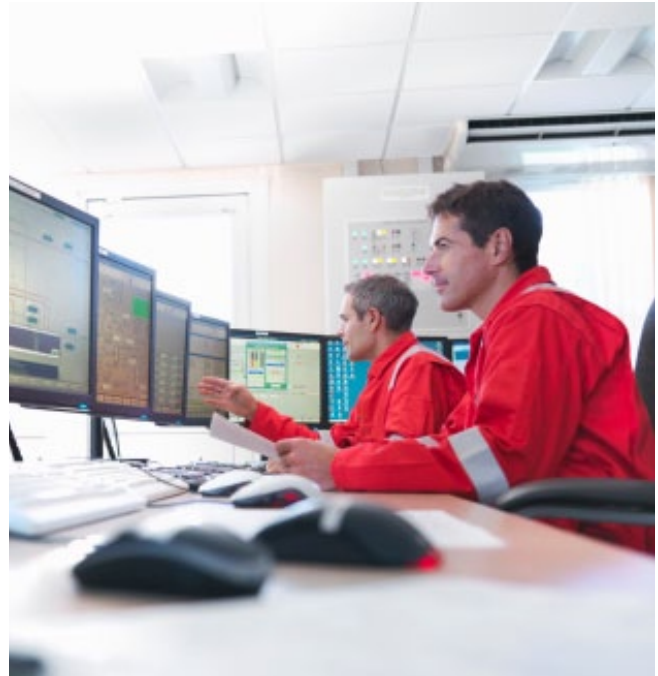
While many economists agree on the long-term, positive economic impacts of high-quality early care and education programs, Washington businesses do not need to wait 18 years to experience gains from early learning investments. This report shows these investments also provide significant short-term economic gains to our state's businesses, especially in the form of increased workforce productivity and attracting and retaining skilled workers and new businesses.

It is now an economic reality that most parents work. In fact, in Washington State, 60 percent of children under age six have both or their only parent in the workforce – with rates even higher in King and Thurston Counties. Quite simply: access to quality early care and education programs has become a critical workforce issue for our businesses.

Washington families have reported that some have had to quit a job, not take a job, or change a job because of child care arrangement issues. And that hurts Washington businesses' bottom lines. An absent employee means lower productivity and higher turnover, which comes at a high cost to company profits. In fact, it typically costs businesses about 20 percent of a worker's annual salary to replace a worker. Given that 24 percent of employees quit their jobs each year, these costs add up for businesses.

Quality early learning is also a key component to attracting and retaining skilled workers and new businesses to our state – and our businesses need every means available to attract them. Washington State experts predict an annual shortage of 9,000 workers between 2014 and 2019 in jobs requiring mid-level education and training and a 10,000 worker shortage for those at the bachelor's level.

Attracting those workers correlates with the quality of our education system. A well-established predictor of where families choose to live includes elementary school test scores. Children with access to high-quality early learning programs



Monty Rakusen - Getty Images

improved math and reading performance in the elementary years compared to children left out. These programs also contribute to higher third-grade reading levels – an increasingly recognized indicator of continued success in school, college and career and, thus, a factor for families in choosing where they will live.

Building on these short-term gains are the long-term gains – creating the foundation for skills our businesses will require in an increasingly competitive global market. Between 2008 and 2018, 70 percent of new jobs in Washington will require some type of education beyond high school. The quality components of early learning programs – such as class size, child-to-teacher ratios, comprehensive and age-appropriate curricula – will help ensure our future workforce will attain those increased education levels.

The Bottom Line: If Washington really wants to be among the world's best, it needs to aspire to higher standards of quality in its education system, starting with early learning.

Boosting Washington's Economy

Short- and Long-Term Economic Gains through Quality Early Learning

Critical Issues for Washington State Businesses: Across the nation and in Washington, businesses face a lack of workers with the needed skills to fill and perform well in the jobs of today and those of the future.

Although businesses have always needed workers proficient in the “3 Rs” – reading, writing and arithmetic – today’s fast-paced, international and technology-driven marketplace requires even higher proficiency levels in these hard skills. But these skills are too often lacking, especially in young workers entering the U.S. workforce. According to the Nation’s Report Card, only 26 percent of 12th grade students are proficient in math and 38 percent are proficient in reading.¹

Just as important as the hard skills are the critical “soft skills” – communication, collaboration and critical thinking – which American businesses also often find lacking in the workforce. In a 2010 survey of 2,000 executives conducted by the American Management Association, nine in ten executives said these soft skills are important to support business expansion, but less than half of those executives rated their employees as above average in those skills.² Three out of four executives believe the soft skills will become even more important in the next three to five years because of global competition and the pace of change in the business environment.³

What is driving these dismal statistics? Consider these facts in Washington:

- 24 percent of high school students do not graduate on time;⁴
- 60 percent of eighth graders are below grade level in math;⁵ and

- 66 percent of fourth graders read below grade level.⁶

Nationwide, 60 percent of 3- to 5-year-olds do not have the basic skills expected when they enter kindergarten, such as the ability to count to ten or recognize letters in the alphabet.⁷

A lack of workers with critical skills translates into American companies having difficulty filling existing job openings:

- In a 2011 survey of manufacturers nationwide, two in three companies reported moderate to serious shortages of available qualified workers and almost three quarters reported skilled production worker shortages (machinists, operators, craft workers, distributors and technicians).⁸

- In sectors like aerospace and defense and life sciences, six in ten companies nationwide report shortages of the skilled workers they need like scientists and engineers.⁹

- Washington State experts predict an annual shortage of 9,000 workers between 2014 and 2019 in jobs requiring mid-level education and training (more than a year of post-high school training or education, but less than a bachelor’s degree.) This includes a need for 1,700 more installation, maintenance and repair workers each year and 1,000 in manufacturing and production.¹⁰
- At the bachelor’s degree level, an annual shortage of 10,000 Washington workers between 2014 and

“The price we pay for an unskilled workforce is enormous. If we want sustainable economic security, we can’t wait any longer to fix this problem.”

Bob Watt, Former Vice President,
Boeing Commercial Airplanes,
Seattle, WA

2019 is predicted, including over 1,100 additional workers in computer science and almost 400 for health professions.¹¹

The inability to fill open jobs because of the skills gap will adversely impact the U.S. and the state's economic recovery and long-term growth. Unfilled jobs mean decreased productivity and less opportunity for businesses to expand. They also mean less contribution to the tax base, less consumer spending and less economic growth.

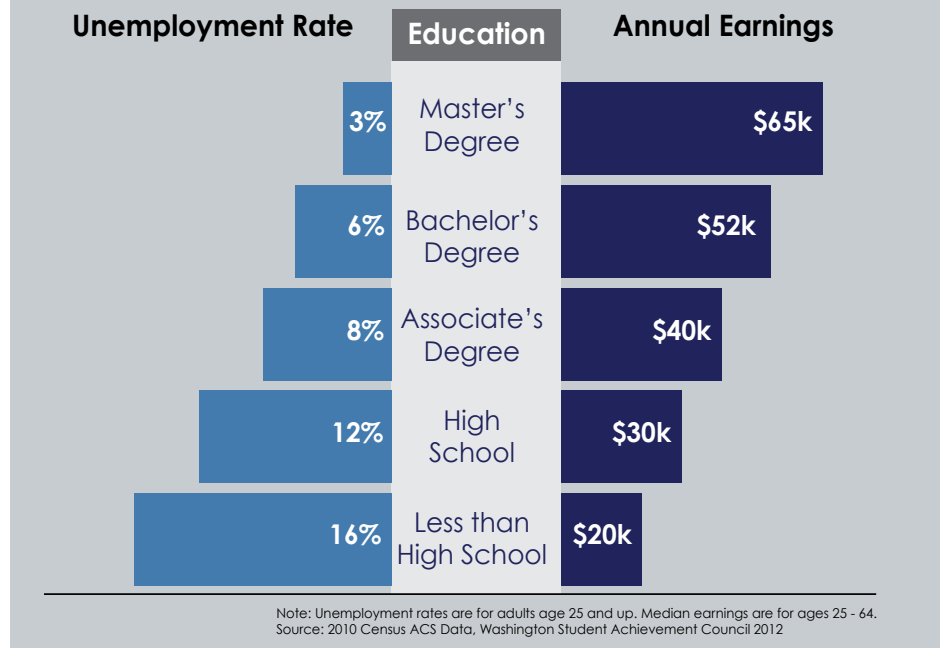
Increased Education Requirements

As these skill shortages loom, education requirements for virtually all occupations are increasing. Lower-skilled jobs requiring less education are being eliminated through automation and shipment of jobs overseas. For example, 637,000 jobs in the manufacturing and natural resources industries nationwide are expected to disappear by 2018 for those reasons.¹² And while employment projections for Washington's manufacturing industries are more positive than the national outlook due to employers like Boeing, Washington faces the prospect of losing many manufacturing jobs by 2018. Washington also faces intense global competition and will need to compete to hold onto highly skilled and highly paid manufacturing jobs.

While low-skilled jobs are being eliminated, the jobs of the future will increasingly require more education beyond high school:

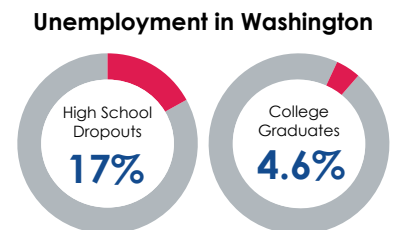
- Seven of every 10 new jobs created in Washington between 2008 and 2018 will require some type of formal education beyond high school.¹³
- The number of Washington jobs requiring postsecondary education is expected to grow 38 percent faster than the number of jobs for high school dropouts between 2008 and 2018.¹⁴
- Washington expects 24 percent growth in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) jobs between 2008 and 2018. But 9 out of every 10 STEM jobs in Washington in 2018 will require postsecondary training.¹⁵

Unemployment and Earnings by Education Level in the State of Washington



The High Cost of an Unprepared Workforce

The lack of a skilled workforce comes at a high cost for individuals, businesses and the economy. Higher levels of education help protect workers against unemployment – even in an economic downturn. In 2011, 14 percent of U.S. high school dropouts were jobless, while less than 5 percent of college graduates were unemployed.¹⁶ Similarly, in Washington, the unemployment rate for high school dropouts was three times higher than for college graduates.¹⁷



Each new class of dropouts nationwide will earn \$154 billion less over their lifetimes than their high school graduate peers.¹⁸ This translates to over \$500,000 less in lifetime earnings per dropout.¹⁹ These staggering earnings losses result in less spending power, fewer contributions to the tax base and lower productivity. These losses are even starker when compared with the average lifetime earnings of an individual college graduate – \$2.1 million dollars higher than those of a high school dropout.²⁰ From an employer's perspective, college graduates are usually more productive and thus worth the extra salary they are paid.

Early Learning in Washington: A Snapshot

Early learning programs serve young children from birth through age 5. They can take several forms -- from child care centers, family child care homes and private preschool programs, to publicly funded early education programs like pre-kindergarten, Head Start and early childhood special education provided by public schools.

- There are almost 440,000 children under age 5 in Washington State.²³
- Over 300,000 children under age 6 in Washington State have all parents (one parent in single-parent families, and both in two-parent families) in the workforce. Most of these children spend time in

some form on non-parental early learning program each week, in child care centers, family child care homes, with nannies or in preschool programs.²⁴

- Washington State currently has no uniform standards across early learning program environments to ensure that all programs in the state are evaluated in the same way.²⁵

Early care and education programs represent an important and under-recognized small business sector in the state. The sector employs over 18,000 teachers and staff, more than, for example, the 15,000 workers employed in the farming, fishing, and forestry sector in Washington.²⁶

Remedial courses and training to help students catch up and get on track for postsecondary education and training are certainly useful, but they are expensive and inefficient. Half of Washington students entering community colleges require at least one remedial education class and only half of those students complete all the remedial classes to which they are referred. Further, only 23 percent of Washington students who require remediation at two-year colleges graduate within three years.²¹ In Washington, remedial education costs students and the state an estimated \$59 million annually, and up to \$99 million annually after factoring in the reduced lifetime wages of students taking remedial courses.²²

Changing Course through High-Quality Early Learning

As the U.S. and Washington economies recover and we strive for lasting economic security, we must create an infrastructure that will better ensure a more educated and higher-skilled future workforce. Training and re-training the current and entering workforce must also be implemented to begin to address the widening skills gap now. But a long-term problem also requires a long-term solution. High-quality early care and education is a proven approach that can help lay the foundation children need for success in school and to enter the workforce with the skills U.S. employers will require to compete in a global marketplace. And there are immediate

benefits for Washington businesses and our state's economy from quality early learning programs: workforce productivity, reduced absenteeism, and attraction of new businesses and skilled workers.

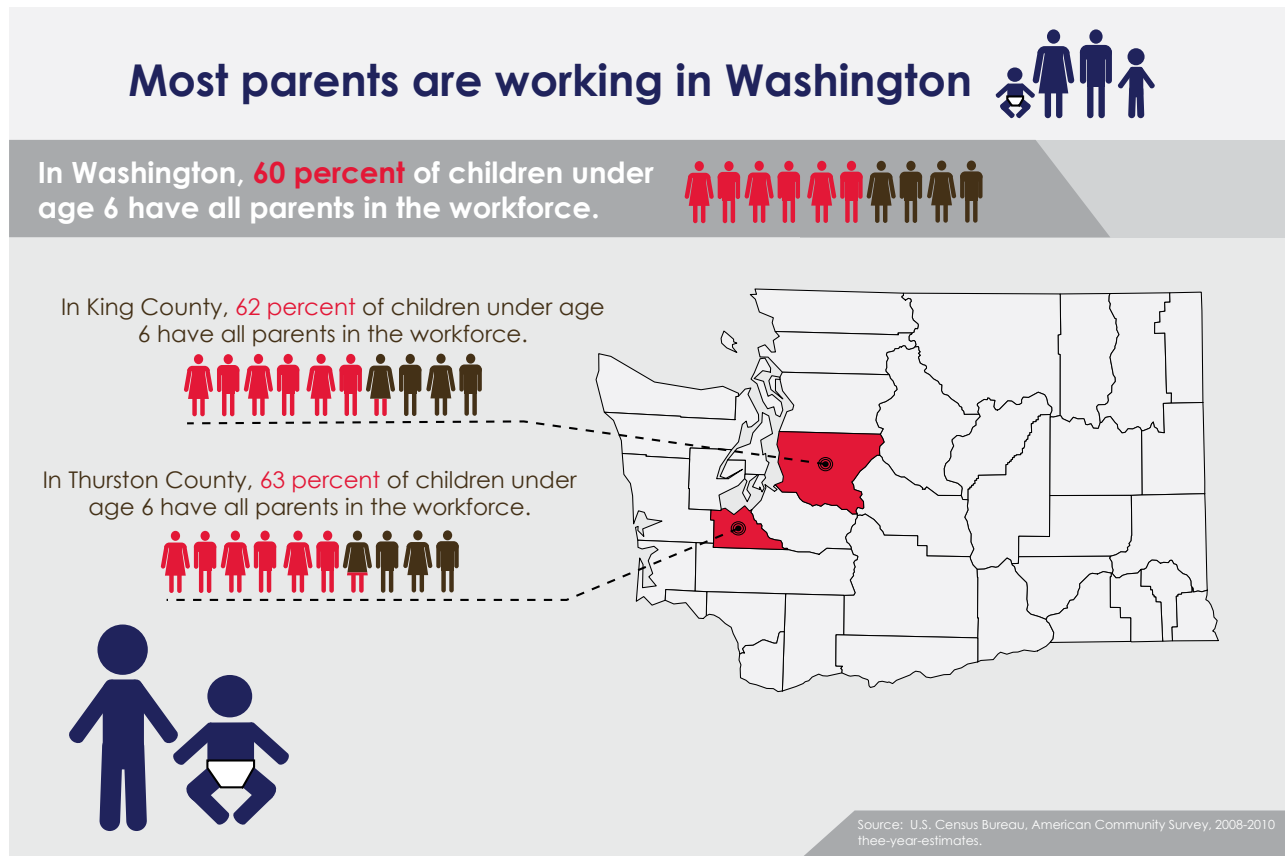
Short-Term Benefits for Washington Businesses

Increasing Workforce Productivity

A majority of parents of young children in Washington and in the nation are in the workforce. In Washington, 60 percent of children under age 6 have both or their only parent in the workforce.²⁷ In King and Thurston Counties, the rates are slightly higher:

- In King County, 62 percent of children under age 6 have both or their only parent in the workforce.
- In Thurston County, 63 percent of children under age 6 have both or their only parent in the workforce.²⁸

These parents – and their employers – benefit when quality early learning programs are available. For workers with young children, child care problems are a common cause of absenteeism and job loss. A 2007 survey of families showed that 30 percent of Washington parents who used child care reported that they either had to make different child care



arrangements in the previous month, or that they made employment-related changes due to child care reasons in the previous year, or both.²⁹ Further, 15 percent of Washington families reported having someone in the family have to quit a job, not take a job, or greatly change a job because of problems with child care.³⁰

That absenteeism comes at a high cost to businesses. In fact, every year, U.S. businesses lose \$3 billion caused by employees' child care arrangement problems.³¹ Worker turnover is another significant expense to business. Though cost estimates of employee turnover vary, studies show that it typically costs businesses about 20 percent of a worker's annual salary to replace a worker.³² Given that 24 percent of employees quit their jobs each year, these costs add up for businesses.³³

Having quality child care available to the workers with young children will decrease absenteeism and turnover, and increase retention and productivity -- resulting in an increase to Washington businesses' bottom lines.

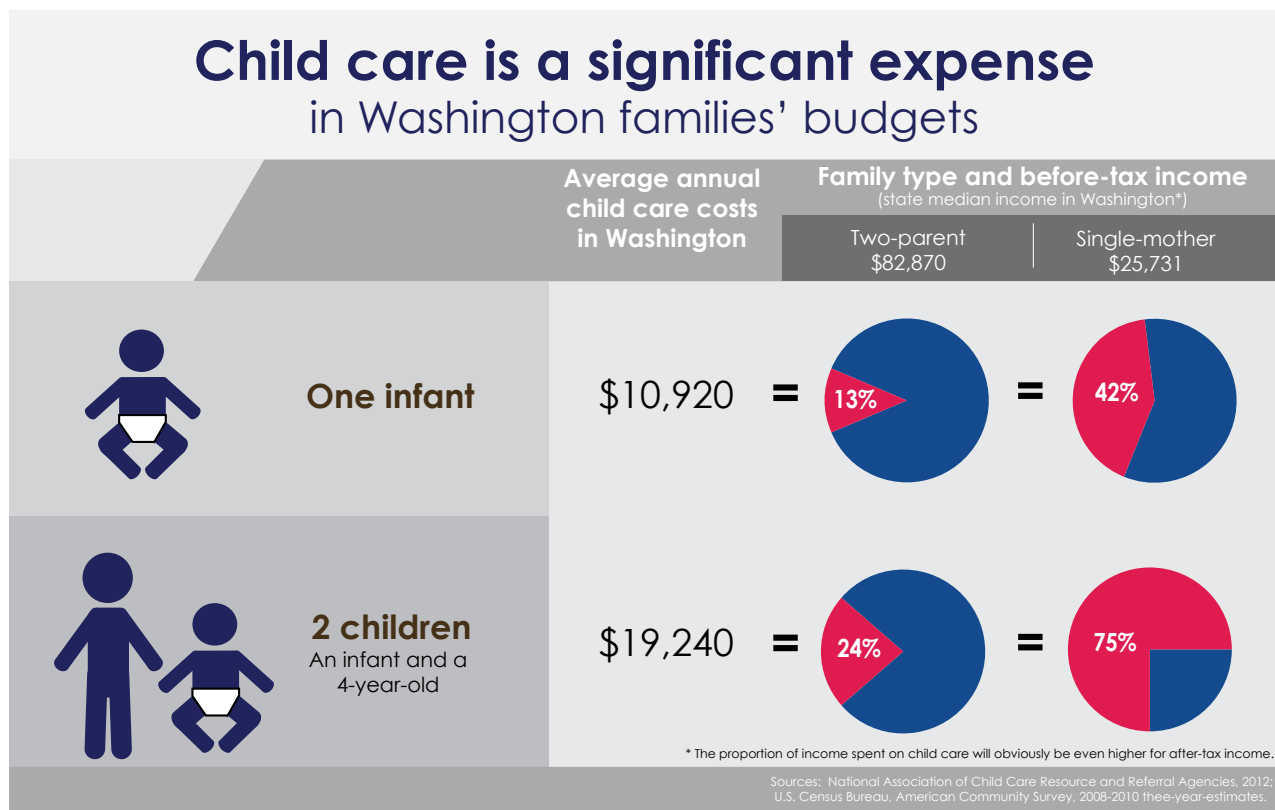
“Children who participate in quality early learning programs are more likely to have higher graduation rates, earn more as adults, and enter the workforce with the skills businesses seek, especially in our technology-driven world.”

Gene Weaver, President,
Dream Weavers Real Estate
Rochester, WA

Quality Early Learning Costs Are High for Families

While recognizing the need for working parents to have access to quality early learning programs, it can be very difficult for those parents to afford them. In Washington, the average annual cost of full-time center-based child care for infants was \$10,920 in 2011. For 4-year-olds, the average annual cost for full-time center care was \$8,320.³⁴

For the average working family in Washington with two children, annual child care costs are nearly as high as annual mortgage payments. Washington parents with two young children (an infant and a 4-year-old) in child care centers on average spent \$19,240 annually, nearly as much as the median mortgage costs of \$21,240 paid by Washington homeowners.³⁵ This annual child care cost for two children is more than double the cost of \$9,484 in annual tuition at a public college in Washington.³⁶



Child care costs comprise a substantial portion of families' earnings. The state median income for two-parent families in Washington is \$82,870 annually. The average annual cost of care for an infant, \$10,920, represents 13 percent of the average two-parent families' pre-tax income in the state. And for single-mother families, the costs of child care are even less affordable: the state median pre-tax income for single-mother families in Washington is \$25,731. The average cost of care for an infant of \$10,920 comprises 42 percent of the average single mother's family income in Washington, a staggering portion of any family budget.³⁷

For families with two young children in child care, average expenses are even greater. The average child care costs in Washington for an infant and a 4-year-old, \$19,240, represents 24 percent of two-parent families' median income, and 75 percent of single-mother families' median income in Washington.³⁸ Of course, these percentages would be even greater when considering child care as a portion of a family's after-tax dollars.

These high costs can cause too many parents to be unable to place their children in a quality early learning setting. And parents need to factor these costs into any decision on whether to take a job or not.

Attracting and Retaining A Skilled Workforce

Parents want their children to succeed in school, and key to that success is a strong K-12 education system. As a result, the quality of the schools to which parents send their children is well established as a critical factor in families' decisions about where to live.³⁹ In fact, studies have established the link between elementary school test scores and property values, with higher-performing schools contributing to higher property values, reflecting higher neighborhood desirability.⁴⁰

An important driver for achieving better elementary school test scores is participation in quality early care and education programs.

Pre-Literacy and Pre-Math Skills for Kindergarten

Studies of high-quality early learning show that children with access to these programs show improved math and reading performance in the elementary years compared to children left out of such programs:

- An evaluation of New Jersey's pre-k program found that children who attended the program significantly outperformed similar children who did not attend. After two years of pre-k participation, children

showed gains of 9 percent in language, 13 percent in literacy and 12 percent in math at kindergarten entry, beyond the gains that would be expected as a child gets older.⁴¹

- New Mexico launched a pre-k program in 2005 that is already seeing strong results. Across the first three years of the initiative, participating children answered an average of **24 percent more questions correctly on a literacy test**. Significant impacts were found in math for all three years and in vocabulary for two of the three initial years.⁴²
- An evaluation of the Arkansas Better Chance program found that children who attended pre-k developed an extra four months' worth of vocabulary knowledge, beyond the gains that would be expected as a child naturally ages. Pre-k attendance also resulted in **23 percent more correct answers on a literacy test and improved math scores**. Researchers are following children for five years to evaluate the longer-term effects of the program.⁴³
- Over half of West Virginia's 4-year-olds are enrolled in the voluntary West Virginia Universal Pre-K System. An evaluation of the program found that children made an extra three months of progress on their vocabulary development, answered **23 percent more items correctly on an early literacy test**, and increased their average math scores when compared to the progress that would normally be expected over the course of a year.⁴⁴

"Extensive research confirms that quality early learning can provide the beginning of a pipeline of skilled workers. Employers want to hire workers who can collaborate and communicate well, think critically, and express themselves clearly. The foundation for those skills is rooted in quality early learning."

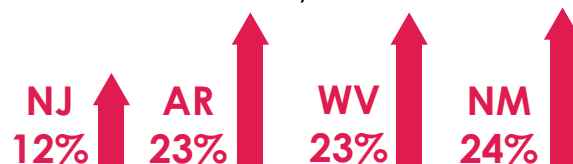
Charlie Lickweg, Retired
CEO of AAA of Washington,
Kirkland, WA

Reading Success by Third Grade

Quality early learning also contributes to higher third-grade reading levels -- an increasingly recognized indicator of continued success in school, college and career. Early education helps continue young children's reading success as they continue in school in a variety of ways. Through

State Pre-K Improves Early Literacy

Children attending pre-k answered 12-24 percent more questions correctly on a literacy test



Sources: Frede 2009; Lamy 2005; Hustedf 2007; Hustedf 2009.

the broad social, physical, and cognitive growth that early education helps foster, and also through exposure to reading, language, and letters in early education classrooms, young children develop skills that lay a foundation for learning to read in the elementary school years.⁴⁵ Early education programs have been shown to support young children's early literacy skills, helping children become fluent readers by the third grade:

- A meta-analysis of 123 different studies across four decades of early education research found that by third grade, about one-third of the achievement gap, which includes reading and other skills, can be closed by early education.⁴⁶
 - North Carolina's state pre-k program has improved young children's reading skills. A preliminary evaluation suggests that exposure to pre-k increased 3rd grade reading and math scores by an amount equivalent to two months of extra instruction.⁴⁷
 - An evaluation of New Jersey's pre-k program found that children who attended the program had significant language and literacy gains compared to similar children who did not attend. After two years of pre-k participation, children showed gains of 9 percent in language and 13 percent in literacy at kindergarten entry, beyond the gains that would be expected of them as they get older.⁴⁸ A 2009 follow-up study found that students who had attended pre-k continued to outperform their peers on language and literacy through second grade.⁴⁹

Education Levels of Early Care and Education Teachers Are Too Low

Research confirms that better-skilled teachers produce better outcomes.⁵¹ If we want outcomes such as increased graduation rates, higher levels of employment and increased skill sets in our workforce, we must be willing to pay for the teacher skills that are necessary to achieve those results. Too often, you get what you pay for. In Washington, child care workers have a very modest average annual wage of only \$23,000 and preschool teachers have an average annual wage of \$29,490.⁵²

Effective teachers are essential to providing high-quality early care and education, yet a recent report shows that a majority of early childhood educators themselves have low levels of education and training, which makes it more difficult to provide quality early care and education.

In general, teachers with more education and training in early childhood education are more effective than those with minimal education and training.⁵³ According to a recent Government Accountability Office report, 72 percent of early care and education staff nationally had achieved less than an associate's degree.⁵⁴

A reasonable goal to attract and retain more qualified early learning teachers is salary parity with elementary school teachers, who have an average annual wage of \$59,190 in Washington. Some state pre-K programs around the country have already moved in this direction, with 12 states requiring pre-K teacher pay parity with public school teachers.⁵⁵ Washington's public early learning program does not yet require this.⁵⁶

As the Baby Boomers retire, the workforce shrinks, and education and skill levels rise, ensuring a foundation for success in school, college and career is essential to our state's future economic growth.

Long-Term Economic Benefits

The early academic, literacy and social skills developed through quality early learning can, in turn, lead to improved long-term outcomes such as increased high school graduation rates, higher employment rates and better earnings as adults.⁵⁰ Again, however, it is the "quality" aspects of early learning programs that are a key component for reversing the skills gap and building a foundation for long-term economic growth and security.

Earnings, Employment and Productivity

Higher academic skill levels and more developed soft skills mean more productive adults who can earn more throughout their lives. And enhanced skills and increased productivity can be tied directly to early learning:

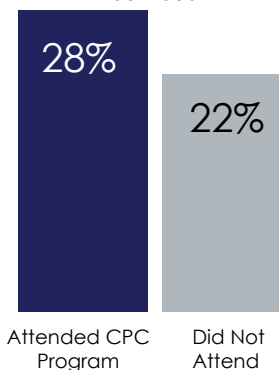
- Children who participated in the Chicago Child-Parent Centers program were 31 percent more likely than their non-participating peers to hold a job considered semi-skilled or higher as adults;⁵⁷ and
- The children who attended the model Perry Preschool Program in Michigan were 22 percent more likely to be employed at age 40.⁵⁸

High-quality early learning also has strong impacts on earnings. Children who participated in the Perry Preschool Program earned 36 percent more at age 40 than children left out. This produced a range of meaningful impacts on their lives. For example, 80 percent of the males who attended Perry owned a car at age 40 compared to just 50 percent for the males left out of the program.⁵⁹

As noted earlier, more education is associated with lower unemployment – something that became very clear during the recent recession. Increasing the number of children who enroll in a four-year college or university may help lower unemployment rates. As the economy recovers and we work to ensure long-term economic security, raising the education levels of our young people may help the U.S. to be better prepared for future downturns.

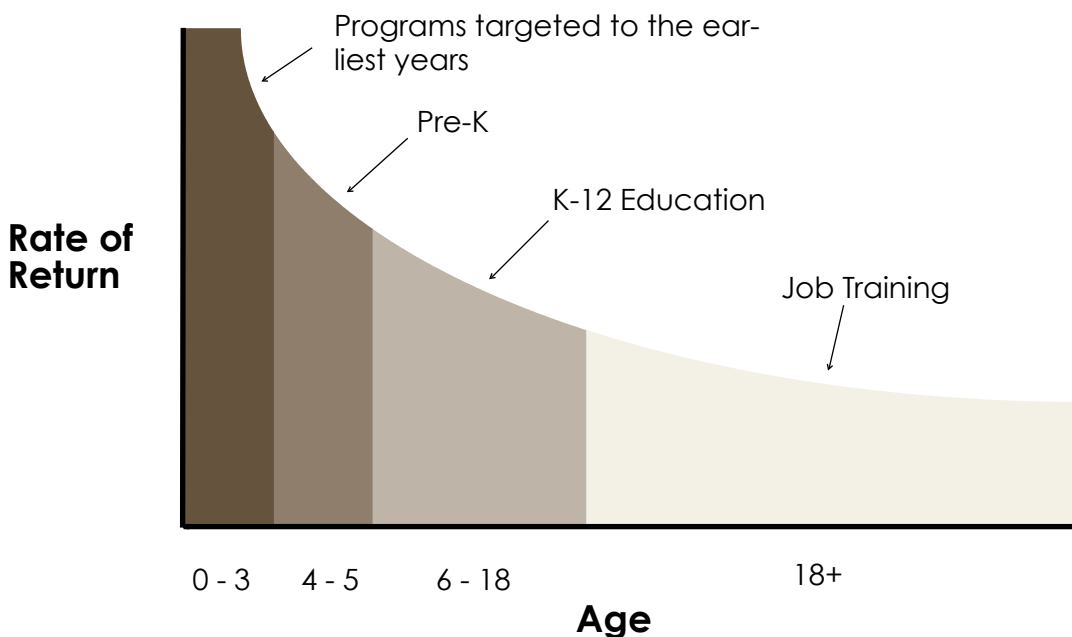
High Quality Early Education Improves Skills

Holding a semi-skilled job in Early Adulthood



Source: Reynolds, 2010

Rate of Return to Investments in Human Capital



Similarly, increased education is also associated with increased productivity, which can strengthen our economy. According to research by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), each year of additional education in OECD countries is associated with a 4 to 7 percent increase in per capita output.⁶⁰ One additional year of schooling also leads to an 8.5 percent increase in manufacturing productivity, and more than a 12 percent productivity increase in other industrial sectors.⁶¹

Increased School Success

High-quality early learning also produced meaningful increases in student success in elementary school and high school. Results from longer-running programs are very strong and show that the benefits continue as students progress through school. Researchers found that children attending the Chicago Child-Parent Centers were 40 percent less likely to need special education or be held back a grade than those children who did not attend. They were also 15 percent less likely to drop out.⁶² Similarly, children who attended the Perry Preschool Program were 44 percent more likely to graduate from high school.⁶³ Participants in North Carolina's Abecedarian Project, a high-quality early learning program from infancy through age 5,

were four times more likely to have earned a four-year college degree by age 30 than those left out of the program – which is good news for businesses and the economy.⁶⁴

Strong Foundations for Hard and Soft Skills

The skills children develop in high-quality early learning programs are important precursors to creating a workforce that can communicate, collaborate and critically think – tools necessary to compete in a global economy. High-quality early learning helps children develop these soft skills, as well as the hard skills, such as reading and math.

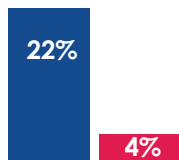
Over time, high-quality early education programs for at-risk children can return as much as \$16 for every dollar invested. That is a return on investment that is unmatched by almost any other public investment.

—Schweinhart et al., 2005

When pre-k teachers provided moderate- to high-quality instruction in their classrooms, students showed more advanced academic and language skills than those in low-quality classrooms.⁶⁵ Another rigorous study of state-funded pre-kindergarten, in Tennessee, found that overall gains in literacy for children who attended were 50 percent greater than for those who did not attend. In oral comprehension and picture

vocabulary, participants made twice the gains of those students who were randomly assigned to a wait list.⁶⁶

Analysis by the Nobel Prize-winning economist James Heckman of the University of Chicago shows that high-quality early learning not only helps children develop a foundation for reading and math, it also helps them develop the aforementioned soft skills needed throughout their careers. And in Pennsylvania's pre-k program, **the percentage of 3-year-old children with conduct or self-control problems dropped from 22 percent at the time of entry into the program to four percent by the time the children completed the program.**⁶⁷



Initiatives to Improve Quality in Washington

Washington has launched several initiatives to help improve the quality of child care and early education for young children in the state. Washington won a federal Early Learning Challenge grant to further expand early education access and improve quality.⁶⁸

Washington, along with many other states, has developed a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), which helps parents identify quality child care programs and helps programs improve their quality. Washington has begun a statewide roll-out of its voluntary program, *Early Achievers*, which will be offered to all licensed and certified child care, Head Start, and ECEAP programs serving children birth to five by July 2013.⁶⁹ The program gives providers access to free resources, including training, coaching, professional development and other incentives. *Early Achievers* is slated to reach more than 70,000 children by June 2015.⁷⁰

Washington is also taking critical steps to enhance the professional development of the early learning workforce and to strengthen data systems through its Early Learning

“Just like building a house, it is wisest to lay a solid foundation from the start.”

Tom Mears, Chairman of
Burgerville,
Vancouver, WA

What is QRIS?

Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) provide a rating of the quality of an early care and education program and are characterized by five key features:

- Provides quality standards as a basis for rating and comparing early care and education programs;
- Provides a system for monitoring improvements in the quality of programs;
- Provides a way to disseminate information about the quality of programs to parents and the public;
- Offers a process to improve programs, including providing technical assistance and making training available to providers; and
- Offers financial incentives to providers to improve their program quality.⁷⁴

Challenge grant funding.⁷¹ Additionally, Washington has developed a kindergarten entry assessment, Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (WaKIDS), to assess young children's skills and abilities.⁷² The assessment results help support smooth transitions from early learning settings into kindergarten, giving kindergarten teachers useful information about the children entering their classrooms to help them teach effectively based on children's skills and abilities.⁷³

Quality Rating and Improvement Systems

At least 25 states have implemented a statewide QRIS, and most others, including Washington, are developing or implementing their systems.⁷⁵ Most state QRIS are in the early stages of evaluation, so more evidence is expected in the coming years. The evaluation evidence on QRIS shows initial results in three areas:

1. **Different rating levels can measure meaningful differences in quality.** Studies in North Carolina, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Kentucky and Indiana have

Many Child Care Options Are Not High-Quality

Low-quality care and education leads to increased risk of school failure and other negative outcomes. Unfortunately, much of the child care America's children are receiving is substandard. Though more current data are not available, estimates from the 1990s indicated that the proportion of child care settings providing good- to high-quality care was small, ranging from 9 percent to 14 percent.⁹⁰ A lack of comprehensive program quality standards and a lack of data on quality means that the current levels of quality are unknown, but are likely still low.

A study of pre-k programs in 11 states found that children in low-quality classrooms did not show any gains in academic skills or reductions in behavior problems.⁹¹ Other studies have found that children in lower-quality care were actually

more likely to display behavior problems.⁹² And even more troubling, recent research shows that young children can be harmed by low-quality care. For example, a study of children in home-based child care found that 40 percent of the children showed high stress levels while in lower-quality child care.⁹³ Six months later, these children showed more fear and anxiety in their child care setting, as well as signs of sadness, anxiety and withdrawal.⁹⁴

This reinforces the need to keep pushing for quality improvement efforts, such as *Early Achievers*, to help ensure available early care and education options are high enough quality to help disadvantaged children – and all Washington children – succeed by getting off to the right start in life.

shown that the different rating levels do reflect real differences in the quality of early learning programs.⁷⁶

- 2. QRIS can help programs improve their quality over time.** A recent evaluation in Washington State, a randomized controlled trial, offers the strongest evidence that QRIS participation can help early learning programs to improve their quality.⁷⁷ Providers who received coaching and quality improvement funds had significantly higher levels of quality of the early learning and care they provided than those in the control group at a six-month follow-up.⁷⁸ Additional evaluation studies in five different states (Colorado, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Tennessee and Indiana) found some evidence that programs participating in the QRIS improved their quality over time.⁷⁹

- 3. Higher QRIS-rated programs can produce better outcomes for children.** These studies examined whether children in programs with higher QRIS rating levels have better cognitive, social, or behavioral outcomes than children in lower-rated programs.⁸⁰ An evaluation of Missouri's QRIS found significant gains in children's social and behavioral skills as a result of child care providers' participation

in the rating system.⁸¹ Indiana's QRIS evaluation found fewer anxiety and withdrawal behaviors for preschoolers in higher-rated programs, and a preliminary pilot study of Minnesota's QRIS found mixed results.⁸²

Another innovative approach that has not yet been evaluated is worth special notice: North Carolina has tied receipt of child care subsidies to a program's star rating level, with only higher-rated programs receiving child care subsidies.⁸³ If this proves to be successful, this approach could be an especially effective way to use QRIS to improve program quality.

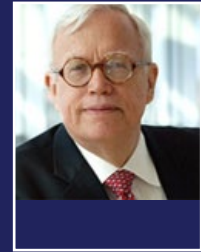
The evaluation findings offer good initial evidence on the potential of QRIS for improving the quality of programs and



Nobel Prize-winning economist James Heckman, Ph.D. asks,

“How can we best invest in human capital development to increase workforce capabilities, raise productivity and social cohesion and assure America’s economic competitiveness in the global economy?

...The answer is to invest in comprehensive early childhood development – from birth to age five – particularly in disadvantaged children and their families... Ignoring this finding will put our country’s future in peril by producing a deficit of human capital that will take generations to correct.” (2010)



for having positive effects on children. QRIS is an important tool for states to assess the quality of early education programs and to improve the quality of programs over time.

Support High-Quality Early Learning in Washington

Numerous research studies have documented the key characteristics of high-quality early learning programs, including:

- Strong family involvement and effective parent coaching;⁸⁴
- Small staff-to-child ratios to ensure each child gets sufficient attention;⁸⁵
- Highly skilled teachers with appropriate compensation;⁸⁶
- Comprehensive and age-appropriate curricula;⁸⁷
- Small, age-appropriate class sizes;⁸⁸ and
- Screening and referral services for developmental, health or behavior problems.⁸⁹

These are the key features of early learning programs that research indicates are essential for delivering good early education and care.

Conclusion

Investments in high-quality early care and education will boost our economy and build the skills of our future workforce. Policy-makers must make difficult decisions about where to invest limited funds as revenues have decreased. Funding for quality early learning should be a priority since it is one of the best ways we can support our current workforce and create lasting economic security.

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