

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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