

The Investor's Case: Parent & Caregiver Education



What Science and Research Tell Us...

- The science of [epigenetics](#) shows how children's relationships with their primary caregivers shape early brain development. When adults respond to infants' needs and regularly talk, sing, and read, young children develop healthy attachment and robust cognitive, communicative, and social skills. Parents' smiles, stories, and lullabies can literally inoculate babies against future stress and help them pass exams decades later!
- By contrast, when adult responses are unpredictable, inappropriate, or absent, developing brain circuits can be disrupted, leading to cognitive delays, stunted growth, and dysregulation of a child's stress response.
- Inequalities affect parents and children alike. Poverty and other stressors can limit the time, attention, and resources parents devote to children's early development.

Why It Matters...

- Every year, [more than 50%](#) of low-income 5 year olds do not begin kindergarten "ready to learn"—a composite measure encompassing early math and reading skills, attention and problem behaviors, and physical health. [Children with low school readiness are less successful](#) in grade school, are more likely to dropout of high school, and earn less as adults.
- Studies estimate that differences in the home environments of high- vs. low-income children account for as much as half of the gap in preschoolers' academic ability.
- Optimistically, evidence-based caregiving practices that promote healthy child development are teachable regardless of background or socioeconomic status. [Parenting behaviors matter far more than parental income](#).
- Building parents' capacities as their children's first educators offers a profound opportunity to strengthen families, reduce kindergarten readiness gaps, and disrupt cycles of intergenerational disadvantage.

What "Good" Would Look Like...

- [83% of parents believe good parenting can be learned](#), and 69% would use more positive parenting practices if they knew them. We must use existing knowledge and emerging innovations to engage, educate, and equip far more caregivers.
- [Evidence-based practices](#) that foster nurturing, learning-rich environments and ensure all children are developmentally on-track include: (a) contingent responsiveness; (b) showing warmth and sensitivity; (c) routines and reduced household chaos; (d) shared book reading and talking to children; (e) practices that promote children's health and safety; and (f) appropriate (less harsh) discipline.

Strategies for Scaled Impact....

Innovative delivery models that integrate individualized and group supports and leverage digital tech to reach more parents and caregivers

Nudges and other motivational science techniques that increase caregiver participation and engagement

Trauma-informed, culturally relevant two-generation approaches that recognize adults' needs and strengths and build their capacities

Dig Deeper: Parent & Caregiver Education

Key Terms

- **Epigenetics:** how environmental influences (relationships and experiences) affect gene expression
- **Contingent responsiveness:** when adults actively listen to children, asking questions and giving relevant responses; also called serve & return
- **Scaffolding:** temporary supports that adults provide to help children develop skills and grow increasingly independent overtime

Key Research Studies

- The role of responsive parenting in children's early social and linguistic development
- How parenting differences contribute to racial and ethnic gaps in school readiness
- The potential of and barriers to achieving high-quality home visiting at scale

Field Leaders

- Nurse-Family Partnership's home visiting educates and empowers first-time parents in 40+ states
- ParentChild+ and AVANCE support toddlers, parents, and family child care providers to bolster early learning
- EMPath's brain science-based mentoring helps low-income parents achieve economic self-sufficiency
- Parents as Teachers integrates home visits, group supports and resources, and child screening

Promising Innovators

- Centering Healthcare develops parents' skills and builds community through group medical visits
- HealthySteps promotes positive parenting via pediatric primary care
- ParentsTogether uses Facebook Messenger to provide parenting resources and enable advocacy
- FIND employs video coaching to facilitates responsive, supportive caregiving to improve development outcomes in early childhood
- Visit our Venture Index for more!

Key Funders

- Thrive Washington
- First 5 LA
- Blue Meridian Partners
- Bezos Family Foundation
- Overdeck Family Foundation
- Local United Ways, including North Texas Area
- *To learn more, check out this [national database of funders in this space!](#)*

Sample Metrics & Tools

METRICS

- Parents' attunement and response to child's interests and needs
- Children's tendency to seek comfort from caregivers and feel soothed

ASSESSMENT TOOLS

- Parent Attachment Diary
- Parenting Interactions with Children: Checklist of Observations Linked to Outcomes (PICCOLO)

Want to learn more? Check out Promise's full [resource library!](#)
Feedback on our materials? [Share your thoughts](#) with us!