



INVESTING IN CALIFORNIA'S BABIES MEANS INVESTING IN CALIFORNIA

Children's first three years provide experiences that begin a continuum of learning, literacy and competence that are the foundation of achievement in the school years and into adulthood. Research from a range of disciplines—neuroscience, behavioral research, program evaluation and economic analysis—demonstrates that children's first experiences and relationships are critical to their ability to grow up healthy and prepared to succeed in school and in life.

Too many young children start school—even preschool—without the knowledge and abilities that are a prerequisite to success, and this gap widens over time. By age three, children in more affluent families will have heard 30 million more words, on average, than children in low-income families. This difference is likely to contribute to future school readiness and achievement gaps, as children's vocabulary development by age three has been shown to predict school achievement in third grade. Too few California infants and toddlers receive the services and supports that can help close this gap, such as high-quality care and early learning opportunities.

FACTS AND FIGURES

- > One-third of California's 1.6 million infants and toddlers face serious risks that compromise their development and school readiness.²
- > 330,000 California children under age three live in families struggling with poverty and challenged to meet basic family needs.³
- > Many babies experience domestic violence, family drug use, family dissolution or homelessness. These chal-

lenges are associated with poor school performance, high school drop-out, juvenile delinquency, and other problems that compromise life success.⁴

- > Cost-benefit research shows that for at-risk children—and the schools they will attend—playing catch-up later in life is expensive and inadequate.
- > While roughly 85% of the brain's core structures are formed by age three, only two cents of every dollar of California's state and local investment in developmental and education programs for children birth to age 18 supports infants and toddlers.⁵

THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP BEGINS TO SHOW AS EARLY AS 18 MONTHS OF AGE IN VOCABULARY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CHILDREN WHO HAVE HIGH VS. LOW EXPOSURE TO A RICH LANGUAGE ENVIRONMENT. THESE EARLY VOCABULARY DIFFERENCES PREDICT READING SCORES IN THIRD GRADE.¹

POLICY PRIORITIES

Today's budget decisions have immediate and long-term consequences on California's youngest, most vulnerable children and their families. Greater investment now in our infants and toddlers will reap significant future savings in public pro-

grams, create a more productive workforce and increase the number of future citizens who are self-sufficient.

Critical steps toward ensuring the future of California's youngest children include:

1. **Ensure low-income working families can access high quality child care and early learning experiences for their infants and toddlers while parents work.**
 - > Increase the availability of publicly subsidized high-quality infant and toddler child care and education opportunities so that low-income families can work toward economic stability.
 - > Increase the level of reimbursement received by child care providers who accept subsidized infants

and toddlers, and provide them quality improvement supports and professional development opportunities.

- › Pass pending legislation to inspect licensed child care centers that serve infants and toddlers annually and provide more technical assistance and support to providers.

2. Keep health care, including prenatal care, available and affordable for low-income families

- › Keep out-of-pocket health care costs for vulnerable low-income children and families from climbing, so that families do not delay in seeking the care needed for their children. Well-baby check-ups, immunizations, screening and early treatment for children's health problems are essential to preventing medical problems later in life.

3. Invest in services that work to help families meet their parenting responsibilities.

- › Provide evidence-based home visitation programs, with culturally competent child development information, learning activities and family supports, for pregnant and newly parenting families.
- › Keep teenage parents in school with educational programs that support them and provide safe early care and development opportunities for their young children, such as the California School Age Families Education (Cal-SAFE) program.

4. Identify children with special learning needs early and help them get ready for school.

- › Encourage physicians to conduct valid and age-appropriate developmental screenings at least three times before a child's third birthday.⁶
- › Maintain funding for early intervention programs such as Early Start and keep families' out-of-pocket costs low so that families with developmentally delayed infants and toddlers can obtain the services and supports they need.

5. Devote significant funding to strengthening language and literacy services for children birth to three.

- › Promote family engagement in learning activities to support emerging literacy for all children, and expand professional development opportunities for non-English speaking and bilingual early care and education providers so that they can provide language- and literacy-rich experiences to children in their first three years.

6. Strengthen the birth through third grade education continuum.

- › Encourage coordination and articulation between early childhood education and K-12 education to foster quality learning experiences and integrated supports throughout children's early years, and build off of promising local practices that seamlessly connect infant-toddler care, preschool and early elementary education.

ENDNOTES

1. B. Hart & T. Risley, *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes, 1995.
2. Estimate calculated from data available in the *California Early Childhood Profile*, National Center for Children in Poverty, <http://www.nccp.org/profiles/pdf/profile_early_childhood_CA.pdf> (May 18, 2010).
3. Ibid.
4. J. Heckman, "Skill Formation and the Economics of Investing in Disadvantaged Children," *Science*, 312 (2006): 1900-1902.
5. C. Bruner, *Early Learning Left Out: Building an Early Learning Childhood System to Secure America's Future*, 3rd Edition. Washington, DC: Voices for America's Children, 2010.
6. American Academy of Pediatrics, *Identifying Infants and Young Children With Developmental Disorders in the Medical Home: An Algorithm for Developmental Surveillance and Screening*, February 2010 <<http://aappolicy.aappublications.org/cgi/content/abstract/pediatrics;118/1/405>> (May 16, 2011).