

Ten Reasons Why Early Childhood Education Pays Off

Get them while they're young: A baby forms 700 new neural connections per second.

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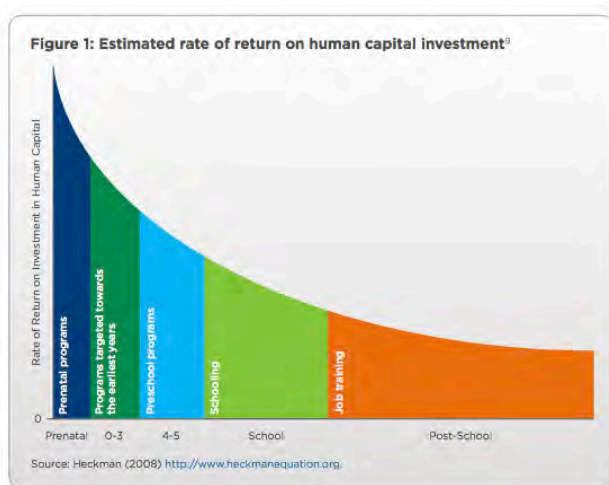
Teacher with class of kids with raised hands

Brain science and economics show that intervening to help children when they're very young is more cost-effective than waiting until they're in school. That's the conclusion of a new report from the Bridgespan Group and the Pritzker Children's Initiative. The report's lead author, J.B. Pritzker, is an entrepreneur and [philanthropist](#); his sister, Penny, is the U.S. secretary of commerce.

Here are 10 claims sprinkled through the [67-page report](#) for the benefits of investing in early interventions in the lives of disadvantaged children. They're drawn mostly from others' research. These are direct quotes:

1. Ninety percent of physical brain development occurs in the first three years of life, when a baby forms 700 new neural connections per second.
2. When a young child enters kindergarten ready for school, there is an 82 percent chance that child will master basic skills by age 11, compared with a 45 percent chance for children who are not school ready.

3. Later in life, at-risk children who do not get high-quality early childhood experiences are 25 percent more likely to drop out of school, 40 percent more likely to become teen parents, and 60 percent less likely to attend college.
4. Comprehensive early interventions that combine health, nutrition, and learning have the potential to reduce risk factors associated with chronic diseases, such as hypertension and high blood sugar, well into adulthood.
5. Investment in high-quality early childhood programs for at-risk children from birth to age five delivers a 7–10 percent [annual] return on investment through better education, health, social and economic outcomes, increased productivity, and the reduced need for social spending.



6. Lifetime earnings gains from increased enrollment in early childhood education would outweigh the costs of these programs (the estimated gain in lifetime income per participant is \$9,166 to \$30,851 after subtracting the cost of the programs).
7. Combined annual per capita public spending at the state and federal level on education for six- to eighteen-year-olds is nearly four times as high as spending on children from birth to five.
8. The United States ranks 31st in a group of 32 developed nations in the percentage of public education dollars allocated to early childhood.

9. Evidence-based home visitation programs reached only 115,000 children in 2014, an estimated 2.5 percent of the need.

10. Over the 2011–12 school year, the proportion of children in three- and four-star [child-care and education] centers with age-appropriate skills increased from 33 percent to nearly 66 percent.

Katherine Kaufmann, a co-author of the paper who is a partner at Bridgespan, says her colleagues came up with one other statistic on their own—and in some ways it's the most important: Half of all children entering kindergarten are low-income (entitled to free or reduced-price lunch) and half of low-income children aren't fully ready for kindergarten when they enter. Which means that one in four children entering kindergarten are both low-income and not ready to learn. That's the Pritzker Children's Initiative's target population. Says Kaufmann: "Here's this critical milestone in our children's lives that we're not managing particularly well."

- Education
