



PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS FOR EARLY LEARNING: THE CASE FOR BUSINESS COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Businesses bring a rich array of resources and expertise to public-private partnerships. Fortunately, a growing culture of corporate social responsibility has led more private businesses to recognize the benefits of both supporting their employees and the well-being of their children. For state policymakers and leaders, this provides a great opportunity to engage the business community in the importance of early learning and encourage its participation in a public-private early learning partnership.

Bringing employers and business leaders together to increase their awareness and understanding of how early learning relates to their business goals and success is the first step in engaging them as partners. To engage business leaders, one must understand a business' motivation for participation and build a "business case" for its involvement. Remember, businesses are concerned first and foremost with profitability and one should make the case accordingly.

Here are some key components for building a "business case" for participation in an early learning partnership.

Positive early childhood development lays the foundation for the development of human capital essential for economic vitality.

Private businesses have a vested interest in supporting the development of a competent and globally competitive workforce. The seeds for cultivating this workforce are sewn in a child's early years.



Brain research has shown that the first five years of a child's life are a critical period of development, when the brain develops more rapidly than at any other point in life (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). During this critical period, the brain builds critical pathways that provide the foundation for all future learning, behavior, and health (Center on the Developing Child, n.d.). Babies and young children begin to develop the cognitive skills and social and emotional competencies such as attentiveness, flexibility, critical thinking, problem solving, cooperation, motivation, persistence, and self-control that drive later success in school, health, career, and life. For young children, positive, nurturing relationships and experiences provide the nourishment and stimulation needed to cultivate these skills.

At-risk children, who lack access to high-quality early learning environments due to poverty, abuse, neglect, or maternal depression, fall behind early and are largely unable to recover from early gaps in learning and development. These children later experience school failure, unemployment, and dependence on social welfare, which can result in a cost to society as a whole in the form of costly remediation programs and foregone earnings from decreased workforce participation.

Because high-quality early learning programs provide physical, social, and psychological environments that promote positive child development, they help to level the playing field for all children before they even begin school, closing the opportunity gap and setting all children up for success (Van der Gaag, 2002). Further, rigorous studies of quality early learning programs confirm that these programs can lead

to higher achievement in math and reading, but also development of the soft skills that are essential to employee productivity and success. Amid mounting concerns about the United States' ability to compete in a global market, maximizing human potential and capital is essential. As a result, the business community stands to gain from the continuous support of quality early learning programs. When the developmental and learning needs of young children are met, they enter school healthy and ready to gain new skills needed to be productive citizens and effectively participate in the economy. "Early learning begets later learning and early success breeds later success." (Heckman, 2011)

Quality early education is the most effective economic development strategy today.

Sound economic data and repeated studies have shown that high-quality early learning is the most cost-effective approach for developing the human capital necessary to foster and sustain economic growth. Investments in high-quality early education yield a real (inflation adjusted) public return of 12 percent and a real combined public and private return of 16 percent (Rolnick & Grunewald, 2003). Prominent economists assert that no other economic development program brings such substantial returns on investment. Savings were measured by calculating the following benefits accrued by program participants over time: higher high school graduation rates, greater likelihood of future employment and increased lifelong earning potential, better health, lower expenditures on special education, lower incarceration rates, and lower dependence on social welfare programs. Accordingly, not only does high-quality early education result in economic gains for participating children as they mature, it also results in sizable savings for taxpayers.

The quality, cost, and supply of early learning programs impact employee retention and effectiveness today.

Not only does high-quality early learning make a difference for children, it matters to their employed parents and guardians. Employers increasingly find that the availability of good early learning programs is critical to the recruitment, retention, and effectiveness of their employees with children.

Today, the majority of employees in the workforce are parents that need or use early learning programs. When employees cannot secure quality, affordable, and reliable care, they are likely to miss work to address unreliable care arrangements and experience difficulty concentrating and diminished productivity because they are concerned or stressed about the welfare of their child or the financial strain of costly care. Decreases in productivity as well as absenteeism and tardiness undoubtedly impact a company's bottom line.



For more information about public-private partnerships and how they can be instrumental in bolstering state early learning initiatives, see the full range of included on this topic, available at <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/state-systems-specialist-network>:

- *What is a Public-Private Partnership and Why Do they Matter?*;
- *Public-Private Partnerships: Getting Started and Principles for Success*;
- *Making the Case for Government Involvement*;
- *Making the Case for Philanthropy Involvement*;
- *Summary of State Profiles of Successful Public-Private Partnerships for Early Learning*; and
- *Individual State Profiles of Successful Public-Private Partnerships for Early Learning*.

References

Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University. (n.d.). *Key concepts: Brain development..* Retrieved from http://developingchild.harvard.edu/key_concepts/brain_architecture/.

Heckman, James. (2011). "Policies to foster human capital" in *Educational Studies*, (3), 73-137. Retrieved from <http://ideas.repec.org/a/nos/voprob/2011i3p73-137.html>.

Rolnick, A., and Grunewald, R. (2003). *Early childhood development: Economic development with a high public return*. Minneapolis, MN: Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis. Retrieved from <http://minneapolisfed.org/pubs/fedgaz/03-03/opinion.cfm>.

Shonkoff, J., and Phillips, D. (2000). *From neurons to neighborhoods: The science of early childhood development*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

Van der Gaag, J. (2002). "From Child Development to Human Development" in *From early child development to human development*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

Child Care State Systems Specialist Network, A Service of the Office of Child Care
9300 Lee Highway, Fairfax VA, 22031 | Phone: 877-296-2401 | Email: OCCTANetwork@icfi.com