

Building a System for Early Success

Highlights from Phase I Findings and Recommendations

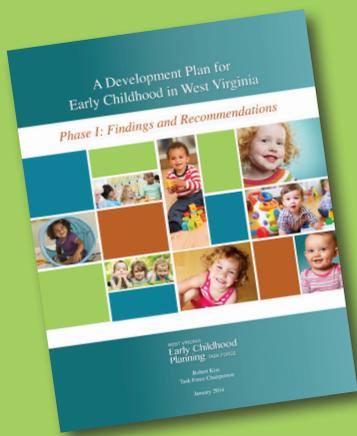
WEST VIRGINIA
Early Childhood
Planning TASK FORCE

www.wvecptf.org

“We do not need magic to transform our world. We have all the power we need inside ourselves already. We have the power to imagine ‘better’.”

– J.K. Rowling,
Author and creator of Harry Potter

With support from the
Early Childhood Advisory Council of West Virginia
www.wvearlylearning.org



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March 2014

Dear Fellow West Virginians,

Recognizing the importance of the earliest years of life, Governor Earl Ray Tomblin created the West Virginia Early Childhood Planning Task Force in May 2013. The Task Force is charged with creating a development plan for the state's early childhood system. The plan will specify the components, priorities and costs of such a system and strategies for its implementation and governance.

This summary highlights key findings and recommendations from the first phase of our work. The complete report, which will serve as the foundation of the development plan, is available at www.wvecptf.org.

The work of the Task Force has been guided by these questions: What do we need to do, prenatally to age five, to achieve optimal outcomes for West Virginia's children? What do parents, teachers, social workers, health care providers and others say is most important to child development and well-being? What programs and practices have been shown to be most effective? How can we make quality services more accessible to families throughout the state? What will this cost, and how will we pay for it? And if we can't do everything at once, where should we begin?

We have learned a great deal from the creation of West Virginia Pre-K for four-year-olds, now a nationally recognized model. One of the lessons is that we need at least a ten-year window to implement bold ideas. Some of the Task Force recommendations will take a decade or more to fully realize. Others support actions that can be taken immediately to improve outcomes for our youngest children and their families.

The Task Force is partnering with the state's Early Childhood Advisory Council in this effort. We are grateful to the more than 1,200 West Virginians who participated in our study groups, community forums, stakeholder discussions and surveys. We appreciate the invaluable research assistance we received from the state's early childhood programs, Collective Impact, LLC, West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy, Tonkin Management Group, Barbara Gebhard at ZERO TO THREE, and Dr. Sharon Lynn Kagan at Columbia and Yale Universities. And we thank the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation and other funders of this project for their vision, resources and commitment to young children.

Sincerely,

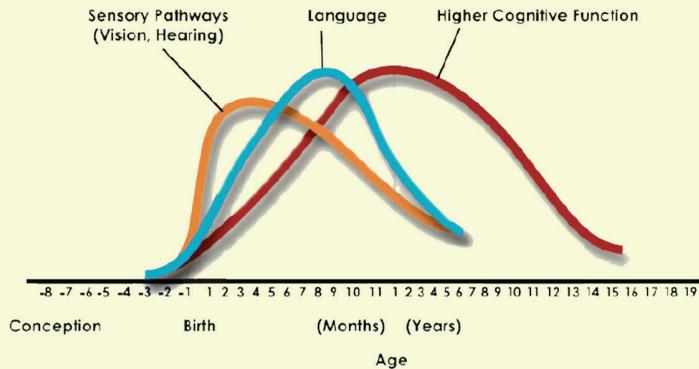
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Building Blocks for a Successful Early Childhood System



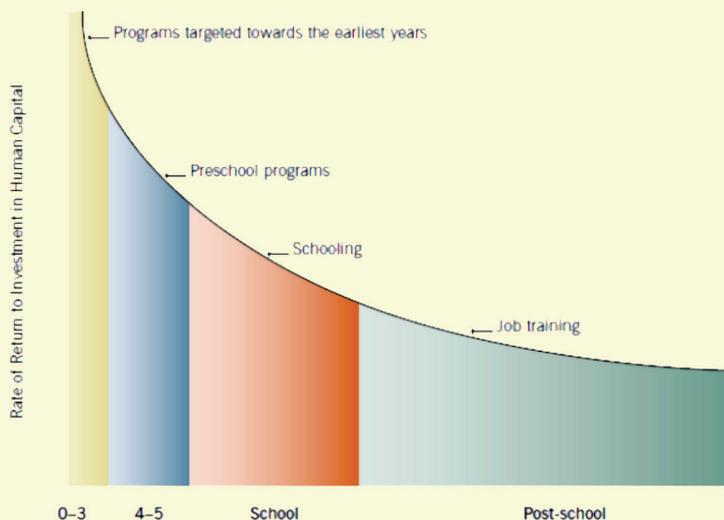
Brain development is most rapid and profound in the first years of life.



Source: Center for the Developing Child, Harvard University: "A Science-based Framework for Early Childhood Policy"



Earliest investments yield highest returns.



Source: James J. Heckman, "Invest in early childhood development: Reduce deficits, strengthen the economy."

1

SOUND SCIENCE

Decades of scientific research have confirmed the importance of brain development during the first years of life. The connections between nerve cells in the brain (called synapses) are forming more rapidly than they ever will again. These connections create the basic architecture for vision, hearing, language, emotions and lifelong learning.

Early experiences have powerful effects on brain development. Stimulating environments and nurturing caregivers strengthen the brain architecture of young children. Impoverished environments and lack of nurturing place children at risk for developmental problems.

2

WISE INVESTMENTS

Returns on investments in human development are the highest during the first three years of life, according to Nobel-winning economist James Heckman and other economic researchers. Children who participate in high-quality early childhood programs are more likely to succeed in school and adult life, as well as contribute to society and the economy.

"Skills beget skills," says Heckman. "That's one of the reasons the rate of return is so high for early investments. It has a direct effect on producing a set of skills that are immediately useful and that are also useful in producing future sets of skills."

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Building Blocks for a Successful Early Childhood System

(See back cover for Task Force Recommendations.)

3

LEADERSHIP AT ALL LEVELS

The central goal of an effective early childhood system is happy, healthy children who are ready for school. About 21,000 babies are born in West Virginia each year. Too many of our infants and young children face challenges that jeopardize their development. To ensure the well-being and school readiness of all children, we need strong leadership in our families, communities and state.

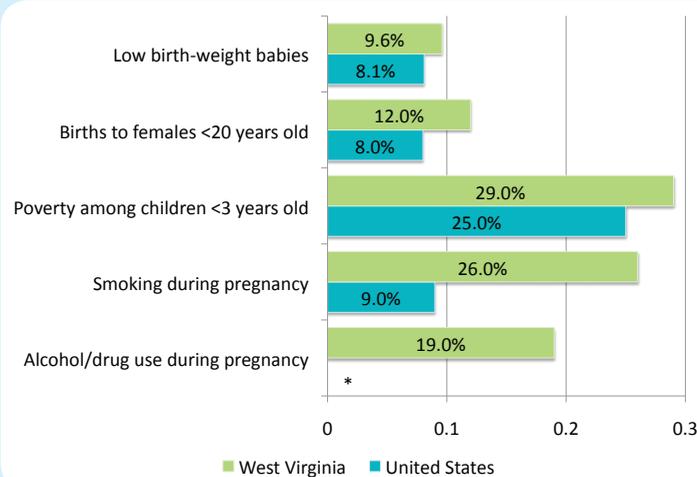
Early childhood is a shared responsibility.



Adapted from School Readiness Framework, WV Department of Education, Office of Early Learning

Families – parents, grandparents and other relatives – are central to the development of young children. So are the people and programs that support families, including the nurses and obstetricians who care for pregnant women, the home visitors who provide information and resources to new parents, the therapists who help young children with developmental delays, the pediatricians who provide immunizations and well-child visits, and the teachers and aides in preschools, Head Start programs, and child care centers.

Young children at risk in West Virginia and U.S.



Sources: KIDS COUNT Data Center; National Center on Children in Poverty; and WV Umbilical Cord Tissue Study, WV Bureau for Public Health 2009

* Comparable U.S. data not available

The larger community also plays leadership roles, such as family resource centers that host community baby showers, civic groups that raise money for infant car seats, churches that put rocking chairs in their sanctuaries, and businesses that offer flexible hours for parents with new babies.

Policymakers provide leadership when they pass laws creating programs like WV Birth to Three for infants and toddlers with developmental delays and WV Pre-K for all four-year-olds, as well as passing budgets that fund essential programs. They also address important issues that affect families with children of all ages, such as child care subsidies for working families and other measures to reduce poverty and its impact.

Full Task Force report available at www.wvecptf.org

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Building Blocks for a Successful Early Childhood System

4

QUALITY PROGRAMS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

In order to achieve the positive results cited in research studies, early childhood programs must be of high quality. This includes qualified staff, a healthy learning environment, evidence-based services, strong parent involvement, and a well-developed referral network among the various programs serving pregnant women, young children and their families.

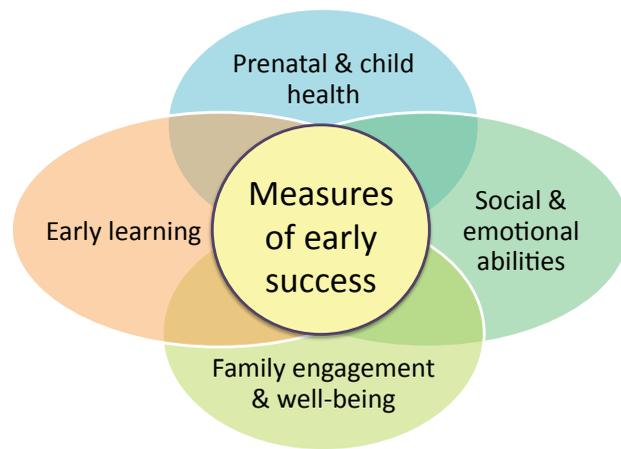
Quality depends on state-level governance and infrastructure that supports program efforts, such as professional development, data for planning and evaluation, quality improvement systems, and sufficient funding.



5

POSITIVE RESULTS

An effective early childhood system aims for positive outcomes in all aspects of development and well-being. The programs that comprise an effective system collaborate on the broad outcomes they seek to achieve and indicators to track their collective progress. An integrated data system that gathers information across agencies is required for system-level planning, evaluation, quality improvement and accountability. Results are routinely shared with funders, policymakers, parents and the public.



Which way forward for West Virginia's Young Children? See back cover.



Which Way Forward for West Virginia's Young Children?

The Early Childhood Planning Task Force has identified 16 key strategies for improving West Virginia's early childhood system, which are described in the Phase I Findings and Recommendations report at www.wvecptf.org and will serve as the foundation of the Development Plan.

A. Increase participation in early childhood programs.

- 1) Phase in evidence-based home visiting programs in every county for families who are expecting or raising young children.
- 2) Serve more infants and toddlers at risk of developmental delay through WV Birth to Three.
- 3) Raise the income limit for child care subsidies to 200 percent of the federal poverty level.
- 4) Raise subsidy reimbursement rates to child care providers to 75 percent of market rate.
- 5) Strengthen collaboration between health providers and early childhood programs regarding assessments and referrals.
- 6) Strengthen local planning and coordination of programs.
- 7) Expand early learning opportunities for children from birth through age three in group settings, including child care, Head Start and Pre-K.

B. Improve the quality of early childhood services and infrastructure.

- 1) Implement a quality rating and improvement system for early childhood services.
- 2) Strengthen family engagement and leadership throughout the early childhood system.
- 3) Improve the recruitment and retention of qualified staff in early childhood programs.
- 4) Develop an integrated data system across programs to improve system planning and evaluation.
- 5) Support a cross-sector professional development system for early childhood programs.

C. Strengthen early childhood system governance and financing.

- 1) Strengthen the composition and duties of the Early Childhood Advisory Council within the Department of Education and the Arts.
- 2) Relocate the Head Start State Collaboration Office to the Department of Education and the Arts for greater collaboration with the Early Childhood Advisory Council.
- 3) Pursue the most promising financing options based on state and national research.
- 4) Design a governance system that ensures the coordination, alignment, efficiency and accountability of the state's early childhood system, giving strong consideration to a Cabinet-level agency.

System Financing & Governance →

ENGAGEMENT:
Awareness,
Motivation &
Information

ACCESS:
Availability,
Accessibility &
Affordability

QUALITY:
People, Places,
Programming &
Linkages

Appropriate &
Effective Early
Childhood
Services



The path to positive outcomes for young children



Full Task Force report available at
www.wvecptf.org