

Future Leaders Town Hall

Strong Start. Early Education in Arizona.

Key Facts

**STRONG
START.**



Introduction

The development of human capital is our future and depends on a strong foundation during early childhood. Babies are born learning, and the engagement and experiences provided from birth have a profound impact on a child's success well into adulthood. Parents, grandparents, and early childhood professionals know intuitively what neuroscience advances have now concretely indicated – the early years are a pivotal time of development. The attitudes, approaches, and activities taken by adults with and for young children during this crucial time can make the difference between a strong start and a faltering start.

Early Childhood and Early Childhood Education Defined

Early childhood is a stage in human development from birth to age 8. Early childhood education refers to the formal teaching of young children by people outside the family or in settings outside the home, or sometimes by parents and others within the home. "Early Care and Education" is another common term for the programs and services provided for children from the very young to school age.



Does preschool have long-term educational and economic benefits? Research suggests the answer may be YES.

Intensive preschool interventions targeting disadvantaged children have been shown to yield significant gains that may last well into adulthood. Longitudinal studies have been conducted to evaluate the enduring outcomes of several well-known preschool programs.

According to these studies, children who attended these programs were more likely:

- to stay in the regular classroom and out of special education.
- to go through school without repeating a grade.
- to complete high school without dropping out.
- to be employed as adults and to have higher earnings.

Although long-term benefits of such interventions have been demonstrated, the costs of some exemplary programs can range from about \$9,000 to \$10,500 per student on an annual basis.



Current Issues and Trends

Early childhood learning is increasingly viewed as the most important predictor of later success in school. The result has been a shift from what was previously custodial care to a more systematic approach to learning.

Arizona is at the epicenter of change, with rapid growth in the population of young children 0–5. Arizona also has a much larger share of its young children growing up in poverty. A recent assessment conducted by First Things First and St. Luke’s Health Initiative found that in Arizona, “... young children are much more diverse than the country as a whole and live in families with fewer resources and lower educational backgrounds.” Without opportunities for this population of children, the result of these demographics will be an increasingly widening gap in school readiness for young children in the years ahead.

The State of Arizona’s Children

As of 2013, The Annie E. Casey Foundation’s annual *Kids Count* report ranked Arizona 47th in the nation in terms of wellbeing and educational outcomes of children. This has begun to change, with efforts underway to align, coordinate, and integrate resources and programs that make a difference for Arizona’s children and families.

The following is a brief portrait of the state of Arizona’s children.

- Twenty-seven percent of Arizona’s children live in poverty, with greater rates for Native American children
- Arizona ranks 48th in preschool education.
- More than 22,000 3rd grade students are potentially at risk for not being at grade level (number reflects students in the categories of “falls far below” and “approaching,” based on 2012 AIMS 3rd grade reading scores).
- The latest National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reports that 75 percent of Arizona 4th graders are not proficient in reading, making Arizona 45th out of 50 states.
- With 14,600 children in the foster care system, Arizona is the only state in which the number of children in foster care is rising.

