



Early Learning: Birth to Third Grade Continuum Annotated Bibliography

Recent studies indicate that persistent achievement gaps among children begin as early as 18 months, years before most publically funded prekindergarten programs offer enrollment. Early childhood development necessitates more than access to pre-K at age four. Proper brain development requires adequate nutrition, access to quality healthcare, and other early interventions to promote social, emotional, and physical well-being. Likewise, research supports such a holistic approach to early education — including recommendations to states on implementing parent engagement opportunities, early literacy interventions and home visiting programs — to ensure that every child enters school ready to learn. Policy-makers should look for ways to align these programs from birth through third grade to ease the transition into school, especially for at-risk children.

The following studies provide a sampling of research on policy topics with nationwide applicability.

The need to begin earlier to prepare children for school

1. **The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2013). *The First Eight Years: Giving Kids a Foundation for Lifetime Success*. Available online at www.aecf.org**

In this report, the authors stress the importance of investments in early childhood education to prepare the workforce of the future. After comparing studies across many decades, they find that early education helps narrow the gaps in cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development experienced by children living in low-income households or facing poverty, and the best way to combat these gaps is to create an aligned early education system for children through age eight. Coordinating family, school and community early education efforts and linking these efforts to outcomes can ensure that more children enter school ready to learn. The authors recommend the following policies to help close the gap in school readiness: provide support for parents so they can effectively care for their children; increase access, especially for low-income children, to high-quality programs that are aligned from birth through age eight; and create comprehensive and integrated early childhood systems and programs with associated longitudinal data systems to fully support the cognitive, social, physical, and emotional development of children into elementary school.

2. **Fernald, A., Marchman, V.A., & Weisleder, A. (2013). SES Differences in Language Processing Skill and Vocabulary are Evident at 18 Months. *Developmental Science* (16.2), 234-248.**

In this study, researchers compared the earliest language development for infants from various socioeconomic backgrounds. They followed these infants from 18 to 24 months, longitudinally measuring language proficiency and processing. Striking differences in language processing ability and vocabulary were apparent at 18 months between infants of high and low socioeconomic status. The researchers found that this gap grew to a 6-month difference in language development by 24 months. Likewise, children from higher socioeconomic families are entering school having been exposed to more vocabulary. Findings from this study stress the importance of parent engagement and early literacy development in early childhood education programs to better prepare children of all backgrounds for reading proficiency in the third grade.

3. **Reeves, R. & Howard, K. (2013). *The Parenting Gap*. Center on Children and Families at Brookings. Available online at www.brookings.edu**

Researchers who completed this study delved into the gap in parenting skills and quality in the United States. To assess the influence of gaps in parenting on the long-term success of children, researchers used federal survey data to track the educational and social outcomes for children born in the late 1980s and

early 1990s. The Home Observation for Measure of the Environment (HOME) scale ranked the quality of these children's parenting based on various validated predictors of positive child outcomes, such as if the parent created an emotionally supportive and intellectually stimulating home environment. Such parent-initiated predictors of long-term child outcomes include talking, reading, listening, encouraging curiosity, providing comfort, and ensuring the child feels secure. Clear patterns emerged for children raised in homes with strong parenting skills when compared with children whose parents struggled. Children of struggling parents had lower levels of upward mobility than children with parents who ranked higher on the HOME scale. These gaps in parenting varied greatly by income and educational level of the parents. This study reinforces the need for early education, parent engagement, home visitation, and other early intervention tools to ensure that all children gain the necessary developmental skills for long-term success.

4. **Halle, T., Forry, N., Hair, E., Perper, K., Wandner, L., Wessel, J., & Vick, J. (2009).** *Disparities in Early Learning and Development: Lessons from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study – Birth Cohort (ECLS-B)*. Child Trends. Available online at www.childtrends.org

In this brief, the authors compare data and prior analyses to show that gaps in early learning begin in the first three years of life. In fact, gaps in cognitive, social, behavioral and physical development begin in infancy and widen as children age. Key findings demonstrate that these gaps exist between children of different socioeconomic statuses, races, parent education levels, and home languages. This brief indicates that interventions that begin at age four with prekindergarten are not effective in narrowing achievement gaps, and it suggests that states should begin interventions at birth to ensure that at-risk children receive the proper developmental support to prepare them for school.

5. **DiPrete, T.A., & Jennings, J. (2009).** *Social/Behavioral Skills and the Gender Gap in Early Educational Achievement*. *Social Science Research* (41.1), 1-15.

Through analyzing data from the Early Child Longitudinal Study — Kindergarten Cohort, the authors of this study indicate how social and behavioral skill development affects the academic achievement in male and female children. They find that the development of these skills are pivotal to promoting academic outcomes for children from kindergarten through fifth grade; and the gender gap in early academic achievement can be explained in good measure by differences in how young boys and girls develop socially and behaviorally. Both boys and girls get about the same academic benefits from social and behavioral skill development. However, girls tend to enter school with more advanced social and behavioral skills, and this advantage over boys grows through elementary school.

Alignment of state-funded early childhood education efforts with K-12 systems

6. **Daily, S. (2014).** *Initiatives from Preschool to Third Grade: A Policymaker's Guide*. Education Commission of the States. Available online at www.ecs.org

In this reference guide, the author discusses effective strategies for policy-makers to align P-3 systems and programs to ensure the youngest learners have supportive and connected early learning opportunities. The author also contends a strong foundation of P-3 success should include, high-quality P-3 programs supported by effective educators and longitudinal data systems, aligning standards, assessments, and curricula throughout the P-3 continuum, coordinating revenue streams for P-3 programs to make efficient use of funding, and coordinating and streamlining the P-3 state-level governance structure to ensure that children and families have continuous access to all of the support services necessary for long-term success. Through these strategies, children can be better supported for academic success by third grade.

7. **The NAESP Foundation Task Force on Early Learning. (2011).** *Building and Supporting an Aligned System: A Vision for Transforming Education Across the Pre-K-Grade Three Years*. National Association of Elementary School Principals Foundation and ING Foundation. Available online at www.naesp.org

This review of findings from a task force of leading researchers, policy-makers, and practitioners offers 10 action steps for educational leaders to create an aligned and cohesive P-3 system for early education. By aligning early childhood education systems, children can receive more seamless access to educational, social, and physical programs and services that are necessary for achievement later in school. The task force recommended the following actions: better leverage federal policies and funding to allow for comprehensive state- and municipal-level early learning systems; coordinate state and local P-3 governance systems; expand access, especially for low-income and at-risk children, to full-day, high-quality pre-K and kindergarten programs; ensure funding is going to high-quality programs by monitoring and assessing program quality; better integrate private funding for P-3 programs with public resources; create and align standards for children's social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development across the P-3 continuum; support high-quality educators through professional development and access to competitive compensation; assess children across the P-3 continuum with age-appropriate measurement tools; create a state early childhood longitudinal data system that links student-level results across the continuum; and invest in a strong early learning continuum to produce a more educated and prepared workforce for the future.

8. National Governors Association. (2012). *Governor's Role in Aligning Early Education and K-12 Reforms: Challenges, Opportunities, and Benefits for Children*. Available online at www.nga.org

In this brief, the authors propose six key issues for governors to consider when bringing together state agencies and programs to align the fragmented early childhood education systems and K-12 education systems. The key issues for consideration include leadership and governance, learning standards, child assessments, accountability, teacher and leadership professional development, and resource allocation. The authors also discuss the related challenges and opportunities related to these key issues to help governors develop a state action plan. These challenges call for redesigning governance structures to align the disjointed education systems from birth through elementary school, aligning early learning and elementary standards, developing assessments that accurately track students' progress toward meeting learning standards, connecting accountability practices across early childhood education and elementary grades, providing the necessary support and training for early childhood educators and ensuring that all available resources are providing access and support to high-quality programs.

9. Schorr, L.B., & Marchand, V. (2007). *Pathway to Children Ready for School and Succeeding at Third Grade*. Pathways Mapping Initiative. Available online at www.cssp.org

The authors of this report construct a framework for policy-makers as they align their state P-3 education systems. The report provides policy-makers with a toolkit to help coordinate education programs and better serve children through third grade. It includes research, theory and policy suggestions for states on six main domains that have been proven to increase children's level of school readiness. These areas include healthy and well-timed births, childhood health and development, supported families, high-quality early education programs, aligned early childhood systems and standards, and effective teachers and classrooms. The authors suggest that policy-makers should work to provide families in their state with various resources, including high-quality prenatal care and family planning services, early detection of developmental delays and high-quality child health care services, parent engagement programs, high-quality child care and early education programs, and quality teachers through ongoing professional development.

10. Doctors, J., Gebhard, B., Jones, L., & Wat, A. (2007). *Common Vision, Different Paths: Five States' Journeys Toward Comprehensive Prenatal-to-Five Systems. Zero to Three and Pre-K Now*. Available online at www.zerotothree.org

This report offers guidance and recommendations for policy-makers in response to a federal call for states to implement state early childhood advisory councils. These recommendations are aimed at ensuring that early education systems effectively serve children in their state from birth through school entry. Currently, the governance structures, funding sources, and policies that govern these systems are fragmented and hard to navigate. This report also includes case studies of the implementation of comprehensive birth through five systems in California, Illinois, North Carolina, Oklahoma and Pennsylvania. These cases highlight

challenges and successes as these five states move to align their early childhood education systems for more seamless and quality child care.

Importance of early intervention through parent engagement and home visiting programs in school readiness

- 11. Smith, S., Robbins, T., Stagman, S., & Mathur, D. (2013). *Parent Engagement from Preschool through Grade 3: A Guide for Policymakers*. National Center for Children in Poverty. Available online at www.nccp.org**

In this report, the authors contend that effective parent engagement efforts, aimed at fostering the healthy development and early learning of children from birth through third grade, play an active role in the long-term educational outcomes for young children. This report explores key research on parent engagement outcomes on children's well-being and school success, as well as compares policies and programs in five states. The research suggests that parents play an important role in early development by modeling behaviors and providing cognitive and emotional support for their children. The authors recommend that states incorporate research-supported parent engagement opportunities along the P-3 continuum, including building engagement into the state Quality Rating and Improvement System, promoting the parent engagement services offered through the state Head Start Collaboration Office, using the state Early Childhood Advisory Council to align engagement services across the state, and use incentives, guidance, and reporting requirements to ensure that state early education programs and elementary schools are effectively using parent engagement for at-risk children.

- 12. James Bell Associates. (2012). *Meta-Analytic Review of Components Associated with Home Visiting Programs*. The Pew Center on the States. Available online at www.pewtrusts.org**

This meta-analysis pools findings from 55 studies of home visiting programs to assess the effects of these programs on parental behaviors and children's academic and language development. Findings from this study of studies suggest that home visiting initiatives positively affect these behaviors and development. In particular, researchers found that programs that created stimulating home environments and tackled parental mental health and substance abuse had the greatest impact on parents and children. Other effective elements of home visiting programs include instruction for parents on expected stages of child development; ways to model responsive, sensitive, and nurturing behaviors for their children; and avenues to promote cognitive and emotional development in their children, as well as opportunities for adult program participants to role play and practice these new parenting skills.

- 13. Kirkland, K., & Mitchell-Herzfeld S. (2012). *Evaluating the Effectiveness of Home Visiting Services in Promoting Children's Adjustment in School*. New York State Office of Children and Family Services, Healthy Families New York. Available online at www.healthyfamiliesnewyork.org**

This study uses seven-year follow-up data from an earlier randomized controlled trial to assess the effectiveness of a home visiting program in New York on children's educational outcomes. This state program is part of the larger national program, Healthy Families America. The researchers found the home visiting program provided significant benefits to program participants promising to prepare children better to enter school ready to learn. Children who participated in the home visiting program were half as likely to repeat a grade, demonstrated higher achievement in math and reading, and were more likely to model behaviors that favor school readiness when compared to children who did not participate in the program.

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