

Our National Budget = Our National Priorities

We cannot afford to postpone investing in children until they become adults, nor can we wait until they reach school age—a time when it may be too late to intervene. Learning is a dynamic process and is most effective when it begins at a young age and continues through adulthood.

—James Heckman, Ph.D,
Nobel Laureate in Economics

The economic and societal benefits of high-quality early childhood education, starting at birth and continuing through preschool and the early grades, is better known and appreciated than ever before. Research shows that investing in high-quality early childhood education stands the test of time: lower special education needs, lower juvenile crime, and better school graduation rates. Economists, business and law enforcement leaders recognize and support a greater investment to the early years. Recent polls show that the public, on a bipartisan basis, overwhelmingly supports a strong public investment in early childhood education.

High-quality early childhood education is a lifeline to children and families. Child care assistance helps families work, and children have nurturing, learning experiences. Early Head Start and Head Start help the most disadvantaged families thrive and children be ready for school. With developmentally appropriate curricula and teachers with specialized knowledge, children continue to build success in schools in the early grades.

Sequestration is moving our nation backwards. There has never been a more urgent time to create a national budget that makes more robust and sound investments in children and families.

Prior to sequestration,

- Only 1 in 6 eligible children receive federal child care assistance;
- Less than half of the eligible preschool children receive Head Start and less than 4 percent of the eligible infants and toddlers receive Early Head Start;
- Many children lack access to state-funded preschool programs;
- Quality improvement initiatives are limited; and
- Higher education costs for future early childhood teachers remain out of financial reach of many.

The budget conference agreement must:

- Raising revenue responsibly and by ending sequestration which is causing more harm to children and families in reaching their potential and damaging state and local economies.
- Investing more robustly in early childhood education access and quality for children from birth through age 8.

For more information on the polls, go to www.readynation.org

For more information on the economic returns, go to www.heckmanequation.org

SUPPORT THE BIPARTISAN STRONG START FOR AMERICA'S CHILDREN LEGISLATION

A child's experiences in his or her earliest years can set the course for success in school and in life. As a nation, we all benefit when families can work and children can learn. High-quality early childhood education, starting from birth, meets both of those objectives and benefits everyone. Please join Senator Tom Harkin, Representative George Miller and Representative Richard Hanna to move this agenda and investment forward with your support of S. 1697, Strong Start for America's Children Act.

The Strong Start for America's Children legislation recognizes the importance of starting high-quality early childhood education from birth. It has three parts:

- Provides grants to states to accelerate their work, expanding access and improving quality for pre-kindergarten programs;
- Provides grants to create Early Head Start-child care partnerships to raise the quality of child care and expand access for infants and toddlers in programs meeting Early Head Start standards; and
- Calls for expanded voluntary support for families through home visiting that promotes positive parent-child interaction, healthy child development and family self-sufficiency.

NAEYC is particularly pleased to see the emphasis on:

- Using high-quality, research-based and developmentally appropriate standards and assessments in all settings and avoiding inappropriate use of testing;
- Building on existing state systems of prekindergarten and using high-quality child care, Head Start and schools to deliver preschool programs;
- Ensuring that programs engage families and support children's comprehensive needs;
- Attracting and retaining teachers by helping them to gain the specialized knowledge required and earn degrees in early childhood education, including improved compensation;
- Improving and expanding access to infant and toddler care through Early Head Start/child care partnerships; and
- Strengthening families by providing access to voluntary home visiting in the critical infant and toddler years.

For more information on NAEYC's standards for high-quality early childhood programs and for professional preparation go to <http://www.naeyc.org/academy/> and <http://www.naeyc.org/ncate/standards>