



EMPOWERING THE FUTURE:

Best Evidence for Investing in Early Childhood Education for Canada

As Canadian policy makers and political leaders continue to debate the value of investing in preschool children, they should note the consensus among Canadian scholars based on both Canadian and international research. We can improve children's lives and the economic and social wellbeing of our society by investing in early childhood education. Scholars from economics, psychology, education, health, medicine, and the neurosciences, agree that high-quality early childhood education results in improvements in scholastic, social, and health outcomes for children and their families, as well as in economic benefits for Canadian society.

We come together as researchers and scholars to ask policy makers and political leaders to move forward in investing in young children using the comprehensive body of scientific research available. We offer a succinct overview to urge policy makers to make investing in high-quality early childhood

education a priority in Canada. We present six findings from the scientific literature that show why investment in early childhood is important.

High-quality preschool shows positive outcomes on child language, literacy and math skills

Systematic assessments across Canada indicate that as many as 25% of kindergarten children show signs of vulnerability in their physical, language, and behavioural development at the time of school entry.

A strong body of research indicates that high-quality early childhood education enhances a child's early language, literacy, and math skills when assessed following program completion. These findings have been repeatedly replicated and shown for small targeted programs, as well as large programs within the public system. Over 40 years of studies have demonstrated at least a one-third of a year of advancement in children that attend a high-quality early childhood education program. Recent findings

also indicate that socio-economically disadvantaged children are more likely to benefit from these programs, thus reducing socioeconomic related disparities in school achievement. Giving children a proper start increases their language, literacy and mathematics competency.

High-quality preschool shows positive outcomes on child socio-emotional development

Socio-emotional difficulties in early childhood are precursors of school dropout, adult mental health problems, and difficulties in the job market. With as many as 25% of Canadian kindergarten children having socio-emotional difficulties, addressing these problems within preschool and early elementary school settings is imperative. These problems can be solved and children can get onto better developmental trajectories. Effects of preschool programs that target all children have been somewhat modest, but effects for children who are already showing difficulties and working directly with those children and their parents show important long-term benefits. These benefits include reduced substance abuse, school dropout, juvenile delinquency, and adult criminality, as well as higher levels of employment and income in the job market.

Greater benefits are seen with higher quality of programs

In Canada, we must increase our investment in early childhood education without taking shortcuts on quality. Preschool programs that are high quality have been repeatedly shown to have larger positive impacts on the development of a child. Higher-quality programming also results in improvements that are more likely to be maintained. The most effective



elements in high-quality programs have been shown to be positive and stimulating interactions. Providing ongoing support and professional development helps ensure that such positive environments are being delivered. When instructional support is high, children benefit more. Providing

ongoing professional development, improving educational requirements, and teacher qualifications are thus important cornerstones of high-quality preschool programs.

High quality preschool shows long-lasting benefits and is beneficial for Canada's diverse population

Although the benefits of preschool on test scores characteristically weaken over time, cumulating evidence suggests that persistence of the impact of preschool into adulthood is seen in a wide range of important outcomes. Enduring benefits, and particularly for those in disadvantaged families, include decreases in school dropout rates, criminal behavior, and drug use, as well as increased adult earnings.

In an ethnically and economically diverse population such as Canada's, public preschool must be beneficial to all members of our population. Positive benefits of high-quality preschool are seen in children from both low- and middle- socio-economic classes, with stronger effects for children in low socio-economic circumstances, dual-language children, and children from immigrant families. Investing in early childhood education programs shows long-lasting societal benefits.

The benefits of investing in early childhood education far outweigh the costs

Do the benefits of investing in high quality preschool balance the significant cost? Benefits are evaluated by 1) decreases in expenditures on programs such as social assistance, special education, and transfers to families; and 2) a rise in economic production from increased adult earnings and tax transfers. Research has reliably demonstrated that the benefits of preschool outweigh the costs, indicating a prudent economic investment. Indeed high-quality preschool programs are amongst the most cost-effective of the social programs.

Additional child and family benefits are seen when programs include parent engagement

Optimal development of children is dependent on the quality of the home and school environments. Preschool programs with the best long-term effects on reading, math, and social behaviour also include a parenting component. These focus on optimizing parent-child interaction. Therefore, incorporating parent support components to enhance learning outside of the early childhood education program can augment the impact of preschool programs on child early scholastic achievement.

This letter draws from recent reviews of best available evidence on early childhood education and care:

Yoshikawa, H., Weiland, C., Brooks-Gunn, J., Burchinal, M. R., Espinosa, L. M., Gormley, W. T., Ludwig, J., Magnuson, K., Phillips, D., & Zaslow, M. (2013). *Investing in our future: The evidence base on preschool education*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: Society for Research in Child Development and New York: Foundation for Child Development. Retrieved from: <http://goo.gl/2gxwtS>

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