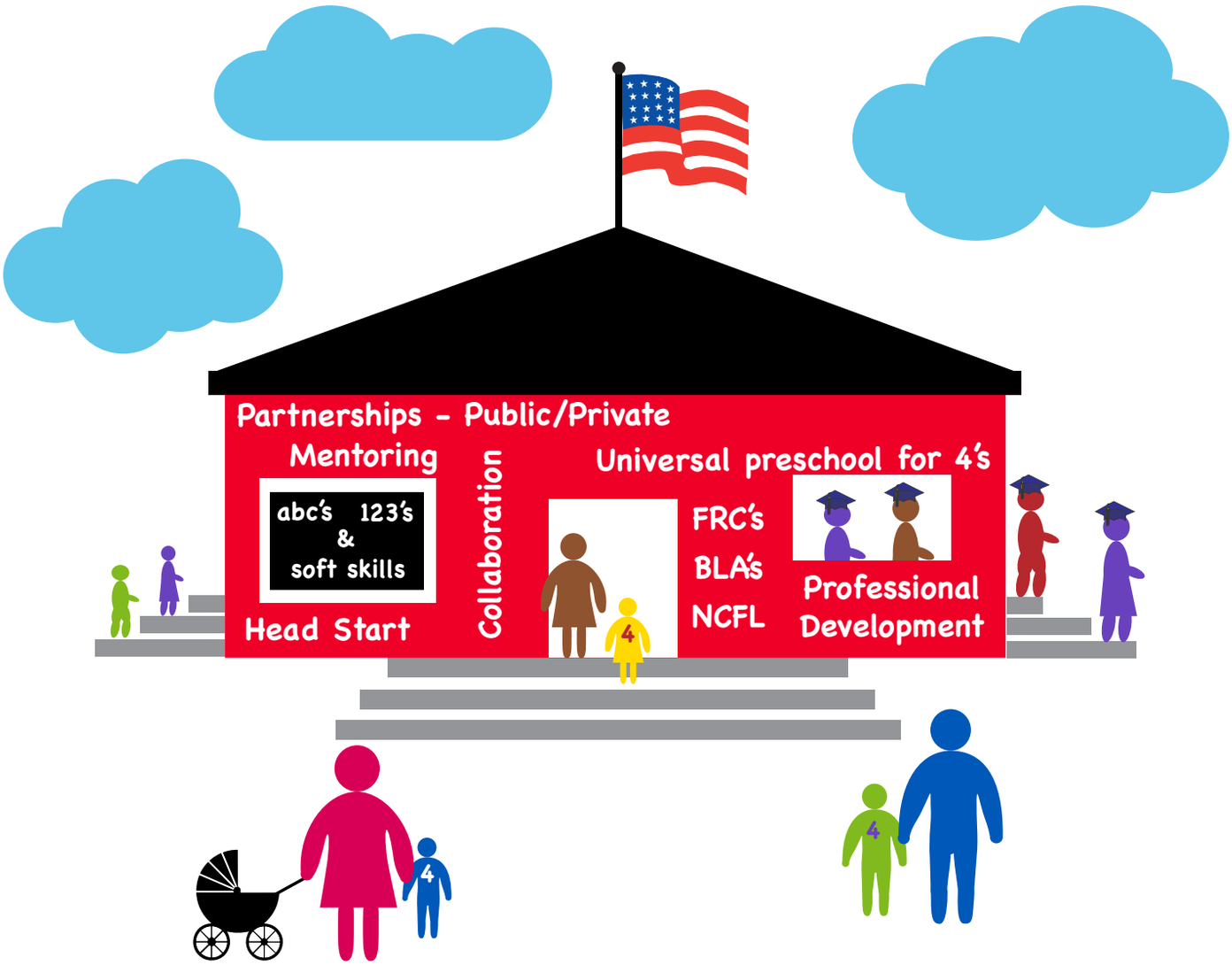
EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION:
BIPARTISAN SOLUTIONS



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COMMONWEALTH INSTITUTE FOR POLICY ISSUES & CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

The Women's Network
Advocates For Democratic Principles

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The Editorial Board sincerely appreciates the time and expertise contributed by the Early Childhood Study Committee as well as the experts they consulted. These individuals are named on page 24 of this report.

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Introduction

The United States spends more money per K-12 student than almost any other country in the world (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2013). Yet we underperform most other developed countries on standardized international tests. For instance, on the 2012 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) exam, U.S. 15-year-olds ranked 17th in reading, 21st in science, and 26th in math. Studies disagree as to whether Kentucky's schools are performing better or worse than the U.S. average, with ranks of 10th, 28th, or 37th, by Education Week's 2013 State Report; 2013 Kids Count Data Center; and the American Legislative Exchange Council's 2013 Report Card on American Education, respectively. If the U.S. educational system is underperforming internationally, and Kentucky's average ranking is 25th of 50 states – Kentucky's educational system needs improving.

Yet, if our needs are great, our funding is limited; so how can we get the biggest return on our investment? Many studies show that quality early education provides tremendous bang for the buck, delivering major benefits throughout the recipients' lifetimes. Nobel Prize-winning economist James Heckman's analysis of the Perry Preschool Project in Michigan, which provided preschool for at-risk children, demonstrated yields of $7 over a lifetime for every dollar invested (Heckman Equation 1). Researchers similarly found that investments in the Chicago Child-Parent Center, which provides intensive preschool for at-risk children and training for their parents, generated $11 in returns for every dollar spent (Reynolds, et al.; Folbre, "Will…").

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Early childhood education should be one of Kentucky's top legislative priorities. Investments in quality early education produce a return of between $7 and $11 for every dollar spent. This greatly improves children's educational outcomes while making government more efficient and saving taxpayers money. Children who benefit from early education make significant gains not only in hard, cognitive skills like math and reading but also in soft, character skills like patience, determination, resilience, teamwork, and deferring gratification.

Early education benefits everyone from children and families to communities, governments, and taxpayers. Children and their families win since early education dramatically increases children's future graduation rates, marriage rates, and income levels while decreasing their future rates of substance abuse, teen pregnancy, single motherhood, dropping out, unemployment, welfare use, and incarceration. Governments and taxpayers benefit because rising income levels mean more people can afford to share the tax burden and because lower rates of academic struggles, substance abuse, unemployment, and crime mean that the government will be obliged to spend far less money on remedial classes, addiction treatment, welfare, and incarceration. Finally, communities benefit because early education helps disadvantaged children catch up with their counterparts, narrowing the racial and socioeconomic achievement gaps that fuel the divisions within our society.

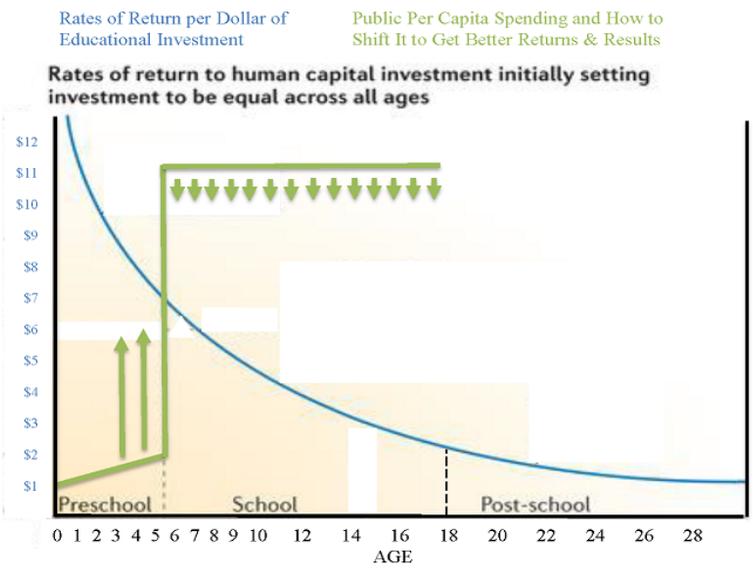
Early education is such a panacea that voluntary, universal preschool for four-year-olds has been adopted by states from across the political spectrum, from New York to California, Florida, Georgia, and Oklahoma. If Kentucky fails to enact voluntary, universal preschool for four-year-olds, our children will be left behind. To plan the implementation of our own voluntary, universal preschool system, we should evaluate the models created not only in other states but also right here in Kentucky and then create a hybrid model of best practices.

But what explains this huge return on investment? As decades-long longitudinal studies have shown, beneficiaries of quality early education programs tend to have much higher earnings, far higher rates of high school and college graduation as well as home ownership, and far lower rates of repeating grades, teen pregnancy, children born out of wedlock, adverse health conditions, unemployment, drug abuse, felony arrests, incarceration (Heckman Equation 1-2; Heckman, "Schools…" 3, 8; U.S. Chamber of Commerce 9). And communities benefit because better educated workers earn more, create more innovations, and drive economic development, as economist Timothy J. Bartik attests in his 2011 book titled *Investing in Kids: Early Childhood Programs and Local Economic Development*.

Starting Kids on the Right Track

Films like *Stand and Deliver* (1988), *Lean on Me* (1989) and *Freedom Writers* (2007) have immortalized true stories about teachers or principals who managed to turn around troubled classes or entire schools. Yet the very fact that people create movies about turning around one school or even one class suggests what a herculean task this can be. Intuitively, it makes a lot more sense just to put the train on the right track to begin with rather than try to turn it around once it's careening downhill. That's the theory behind the benefit of providing quality, early childhood education that encompasses both academic and life-skill instruction.

James Heckman's research supports this intuition. While investments in early childhood education yield returns of $7-$11 for every dollar spent, later investments in remedial education like in GED-prep programs produce far smaller returns (Heckman Equation 1-2). So, to maximize the return on investment in education, revenue should be focused



Sources: Adapted from a combination of the graphs in: (1) James Heckman's "Schools, Skills, and Synapses" (2008) and (2) Urban Child Institute President Eugene K. Cashman, Jr.'s "Spend Early and Often in First Three Years of Life" (2011)

toward children's more formative years. Unfortunately, federal, state and local governments do the opposite. This self-defeating, educational investment strategy largely explains how the United States manages to spend more per capita on education than other countries yet still ranks 17th-26th in reading, science, and math (OECD 2013; PISA 2012). To improve performance without spending more, Kentucky must invest the same amount of money more wisely by investing more in early childhood education. Providing kids with a good educational foundation substantially reduces spending in later years on remedial courses, special education, children repeating grades, discipline and dealing with behavioral problems, GED-preparation, programs for teen moms, substance abuse, incarceration, etc. This suggested shift in spending is illustrated in the graph on page five.

Bipartisan Consensus

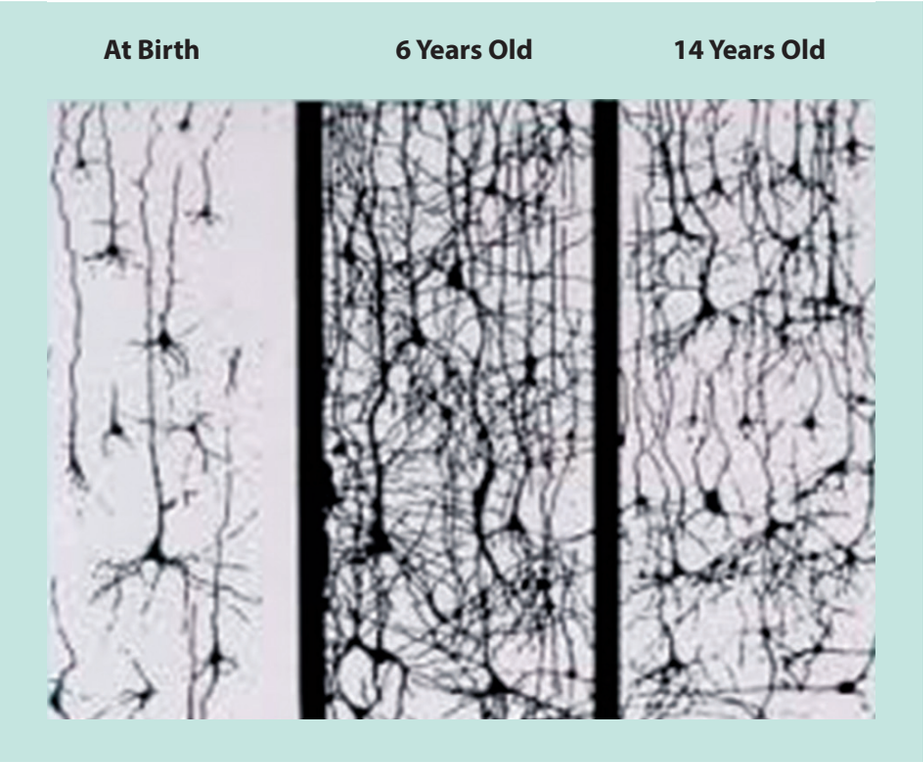
States and leaders from across the political spectrum support early childhood education. Indeed, red, purple, and blue states from Oklahoma and Georgia to Florida to New York and California have all enacted universal, voluntary preschool for 4-year-olds (Folbre, "Preschool…"; Currie 131). The U.S. Chamber of Commerce makes a strong case in its 2010 report explaining "Why Business Should Support Early Education."

Both political parties embrace early education because it dramatically improves people's lives by reducing a host of social ills. Moreover, early education is about the only intervention shown to eliminate the achievement gaps between children of different social classes and races by raising the skill level of poor and minority children to that of wealthier white children (Hirsh).

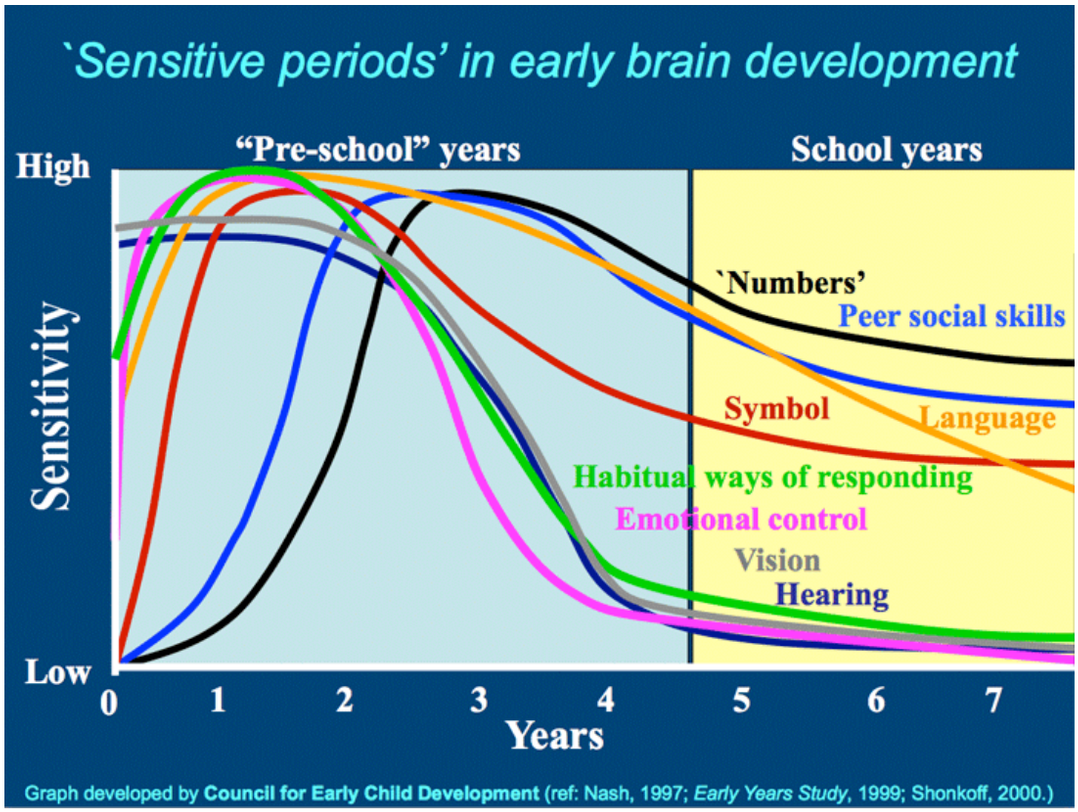
Support is also strong in both parties because of the side effect of lower taxes as a result of shrinking government by needing fewer/smaller social programs. In fact, James Heckman argues that, with its 7-to-1 or even 11-to-1 payoff, early education may be the best way to fight budget deficits and debt because relatively small investments allow governments to greatly increase revenues while dramatically reducing spending ("Invest…" 1-2). Early education increases government revenues, as higher earnings, greater innovations and greater economic growth all produce higher tax revenues. Likewise, early education allows governments to dramatically reduce spending, because beneficiaries will be far less likely to require unemployment payments, Medicaid, food stamps, housing subsidies, crime prevention, prisons, drug rehabilitation, job training programs, etc.

Brain Chemistry

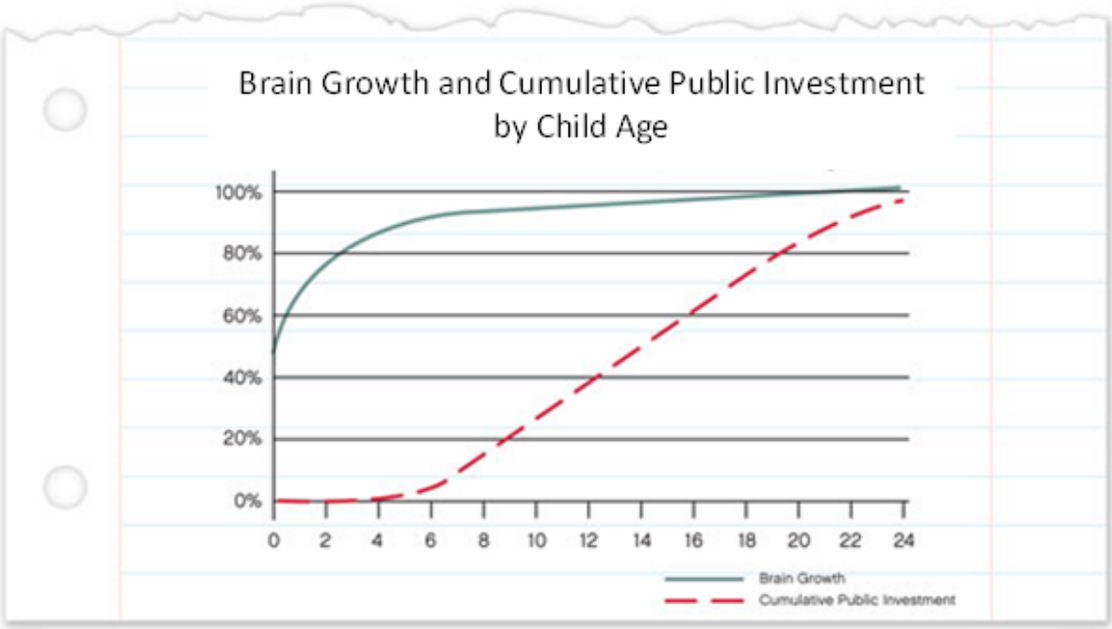
Neuroscientists have been producing evidence as to why early education is so important. By age three a baby's brain has reached almost 90% of its adult size. Brain development, or learning, is the process of creating and strengthening the synapses that connect neurons. At birth very few synapses have been formed but, when properly stimulated, toddlers' brains create up to 2 million synapses per second until age three when they have about 1,000 trillion synapses, more than they will ever need. By the time they reach adolescence, however, about half of these synapses will be discarded due to lack of use (U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services). Thus, the first years of life contain "sensitive periods" during which children are best able to learn the foundations both of many hard, cognitive skills like language and math, and of many soft, psychosocial skills like emotional control.



Source: Rima Shore's *Rethinking the Brain* (1997)



Yet, although nearly 90% of the brain's development occurs by age three, we devote less than 2.5% of public education funding to children aged 0-3 (Cashman). Committee's "Early Childhood Development" (2011).



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Adapted from: Early Learning Left Out: Closing the Investment Gap for America's Youngest Children, 2nd Edition, A report by: Voices for America's Children and the Child and Family Policy Center, 2005.

Cognitive Vs. Character Skills

There is an ongoing debate about whether it is important for education to teach students "soft" character skills like determination, resilience, teamwork, and the ability to defer gratification, along with the "hard" cognitive skills like the ability to read, do math, etc. (cf. Heckman, "Schools…" 21-31). What research now shows is that early educational intervention correlates with ability to obtain life skills as well.

Researchers agree that quality early education actually increases hard skills, as demonstrated through students' IQs whether for decades, as found in studies of the Carolina Abecedarian Program and the Milwaukee Project, or at least for the critical first 7-8 years of life when children are learning the foundations of all later learning, as found in the Perry Preschool Project study (Heckman, "Schools…" 57, 62, 72; Currie 123-5). This early IQ acceleration can then produce a snowball effect, as Heckman points out, "[s]kill begets skill" and "[a]ll capabilities are built on a foundation of capacities that are developed earlier" (Heckman,

"Schools…" 10, 73). The nation's foremost proponent of cultural literacy, E. D. Hirsch, Jr., notes that the gap between well-prepared and ill-prepared children tends to grow as

> "[a]dvantaged students who arrive in the classroom with background knowledge and vocabulary will understand what a textbook or teacher is saying and will therefore learn more; disadvantaged students who lack such prior knowledge will fail to understand and thus fall even further behind, relative to their fellow students."

Hirsch concludes that, rather than confront "the extreme difficulty of narrowing" gaps once they exist, we should use quality early education to help eliminate the gaps from the start.

Studies of the Carolina Abecedarian Program, the Perry Preschool Project, (Calman and Tarr-Whelan, "Early Childhood"…12-14) and the Milwaukee Project (Heckman, "Schools"…28-31) have shown that quality early education helps students build a wide array of character skills such as perseverance, resilience, motivation, self-confidence, self-control, the ability to work with others, the ability to maintain attention, and the ability to delay gratification (Heckman, "Schools…" 5, 10, 22, 79; Currie 123-5). These soft skills are often as good or even better predictors of success than hard skills (Heckman, "Schools…" 28-31). Indeed, Walter Mischel's famous Stanford Marshmallow Experiment showed that preschoolers who learned even one of these character skills – the ability to delay gratification by resisting the temptation to eat one marshmallow immediately in order to get two marshmallows later – and scored significantly better on SAT tests and other measures of success even 15 years later. Quality early education is very potent for the reason that it forms all the critical patterns that will most likely characterize the rest of children's lives.

Government Programs That Work

Education is a public good because it benefits not only its recipients but also the greater society. It increases civic engagement, employment rates, earnings, and thus tax receipts, while decreasing welfare rolls, drug use, crime, the need for prisons, and thus government spending. Low-income children who need early education, however, often come from families who can least afford it. Governments can play a major role in ensuring that early education receives the investment it deserves based on its remarkable rate of return.

Federal, state, and local governments have already made great strides in this area. At the federal level, Head Start—which was created in 1965 to serve children aged 3-5, and expanded in 1994 to serve children from birth to age 3 (Early Head Start)—has provided education, health and parenting services to more than 30 million low-income children and their families. Each year, Head Start serves over 1.1 million low-income children; about 136,000 have disabilities and about 51,000 are homeless (Boteach, et al. 7-9).

Studies of the Carolina Abecedarian Program, the Perry Preschool Project, the Chicago Child-Parent Center (Reynolds,et al.;Folbre,"Will…"), and the Milwaukee Project(Heckman, "Schools…") have produced mountains of evidence showing that relatively small programs run by highly trained staff can dramatically improve disadvantaged children's hard skills, soft skills and life outcomes, but can national programs like Head Start – the oldest large-scale experiment in early childhood development in the country – produce similar results? In other words, can the success of these smaller programs be scaled up without benefits being watered down?

Figure 1

Major Findings: High/Scope Perry Preschool Study at 40

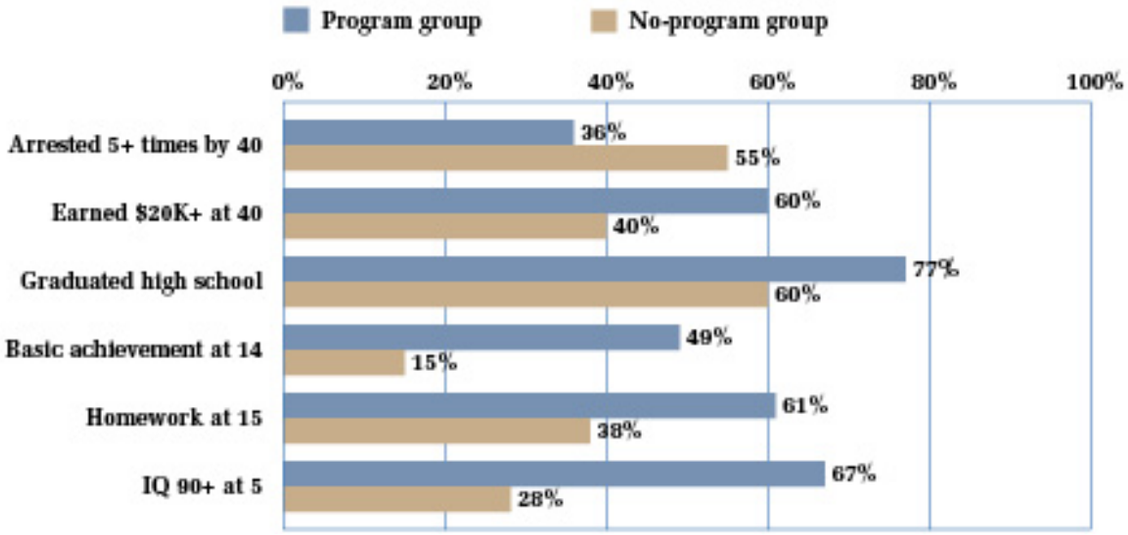
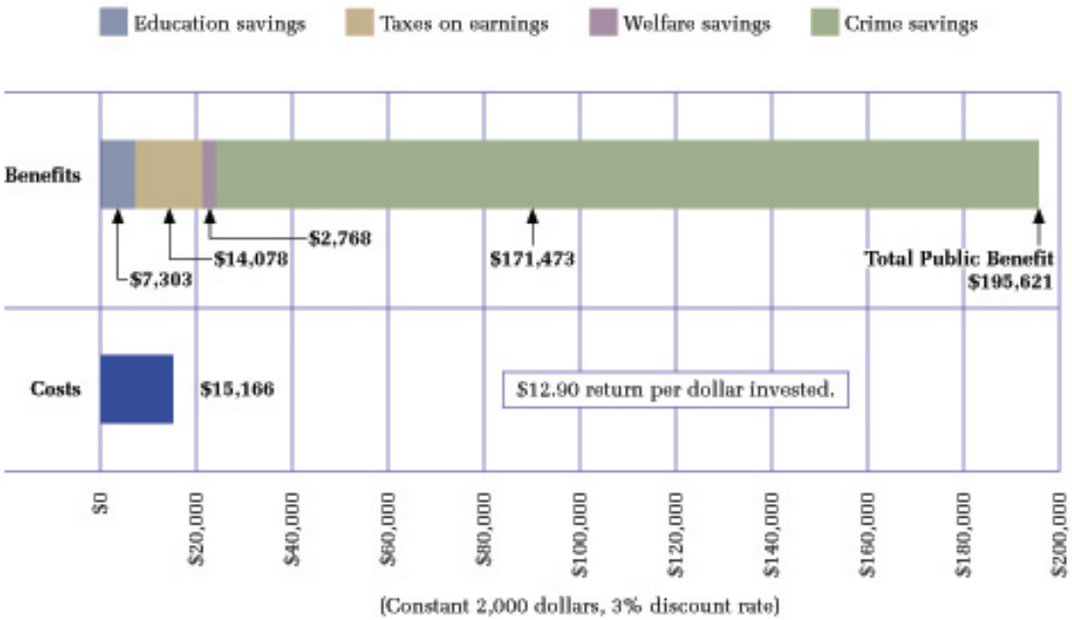


Figure 2
High/Scope Perry Preschool Program Public Costs and Benefits



The answer is yes. Princeton Economics Professor Janet Currie and the Center for American Progress, a think tank, have found that Head Start children outperform their peers on every measure of child development, from cognitive skills like speaking, reading, and writing, to social and emotional measures like learning to control anger and aggression. Moreover, Head Start's health services are so effective that there is a 33-50% lower mortality rate in children ages 5-9. And these gains in hard skills, soft skills and health outcomes stay with the children throughout school and life. For instance, fewer Head Start children go on to repeat grades or need special education, and more graduate from high school and college. Head Start children go on to have higher employment rates, to make more money, and to be less likely to get divorced or commit a crime as evidenced by the High/Scope Perry Preschool study. (Graph above) (Currie 126-38; Boteach, et al. 7-9).

Another example of success at the state level is Georgia's Bright from the Start Program, created by the governor in 2004. Operated by the Department of Early Care and Learning to enhance state services f or children from birth to age five and their families, the program also

licenses child care centers (both public and private), and administers home-based child care and federal nutrition programs. (Bernhard) (Ponder)

Serving more than 81,000 children in a variety of settings, the program's success has been evidenced through a number of studies funded by the Georgia General Assembly. In 2011, research undertaken by the Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill indicated that the Pre-K program enhances skills that help prepare children for kindergarten, and significantly improves school readiness, skills in language literacy and math (Maxwell).

In 2012, another study was performed by different researchers from the same institution UNC Chapel Hill, this time with a control group, and once again results showed participation in the program significantly improved children's school readiness skills in language literacy, math and general knowledge (Peisner-Feinberg, et.al). Further research information on this program can be found at: http://www.fpg,unc.edu/projects/georgia-pre-kindergarten-evaluation or at decal.ga.gov

Kentucky Programs That Work

The Governor's Office of Early Childhood Executive Director Terry Tolan and Director of Head Start Collaboration Joe Roberts provide us with impressive information on Kentucky's efforts in the area of early education.

Kentucky does a lot to ensure Head Start is working well in all 120 counties. If space remains after impoverished children have enrolled, Kentucky allows families near the poverty line to enroll their children through sliding-scale payment. Kentucky's Head Start programs use a "whole child" approach that focuses not only on cognitive skills like reading and math, but also on physical, social, and emotional skills and health. Furthermore, Kentucky's Head Start children receive free hearing and vision screenings, while parents receive referrals to low-cost medical providers, help starting GED programs, and the opportunity to serve on their local Head Start chapter's policy council. The director of the Governor's Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership (GCIPL), Cindy Baumert, explains that her organization takes parental involvement to new levels by organizing and sponsoring six-day workshops teaching parents how to lead efforts to improve their children's schools.

Over the last 25 years, Kentucky has gradually deepened its commitment to early education. In 1990, the Kentucky Education Reform Act created school-based Family Resource Centers (FRCs) which provide early learning services. Kentucky now operates 823 FRCs that serve students in 1,181 schools. From 1999-2000, under Governor Paul Patton, Kentucky created the Governor's Early Childhood Taskforce and the Kentucky Invests in Developing Success (KIDS) Now programs, committing 25% of the Tobacco Settlement Fund annually to early education. More recently, Governor Steve Beshear created a 28-member Task Force on Early Childhood Development and Education (2009), and then acted on their recommendations. In 2011, he established the Governor's Office of Early Childhood and its 26-member Early Childhood Advisory Council, and then increased funding for the Community Early Childhood Councils that serve 117 counties. A few Kentucky cities have been inspired to create public preschools, such as Biggs Early Childhood Preschool Center in Covington, Kentucky.

In 2015, Kentucky demonstrated continued interest and commitment by passing HB 234, which further institutionalizes the Council, reaches for standardization of both public and private pre-school programs, and raises the bar for rating quality. This kind of investment in early education has truly paid off, as our national K-12 educational rankings have improved dramatically, from near last to the middle of the pack. Indeed, Kentucky has become a model of education reform, particularly in early childhood education.

Private Collaborations That Work

While government can offer some part of the solution, limited resources mean government cannot provide the entire solution. Businesses, foundations and other private organizations can play a major role in ensuring early education receives the investment it deserves.

Business leaders know a great investment when they see one, which is one reason why so many businesses have invested in early education initiatives. Businesses primarily make these investments as a way of giving back to the community, but businesses also benefit from these investments when many of the student beneficiaries go on to become better, more productive workers for the very firms that sponsored their early educations.

Kentucky is fortunate to be the home of the National Center for Families Learning, *formerly the National Center for Family Literacy*, (NCFL), which is headquartered in Louisville

and helps businesses organize educational initiatives. The NCFL's reading specialist, Donna Elder,says that – with studies showing a mother's reading skills are the biggest determinant of her children's reading skills (even bigger than income) and because reading skills largely determine success in school and life – the NCFL focuses on programs that educate the Parent and Child Together (PACT). She spoke about business-sponsored educational initiatives her organization has helped to design and implement which include but are not limited to companies like Verizon, Toyota, MetLife, Humana, UPS, McDonald's and Dollar General.

The NCFL helped Verizon create the Wonderopolis® and Thinkfinity websites to foster children's curiosity about the world around them and to help families bond through a common love for learning. In 2011, *Time Magazine* named Wonderopolis® one of the world's "Top 50 Websites," but the NCFL and Verizon are making it even better by incorporating even more of the science, technology, engineering, & math (STEM) knowledge that our economy needs. Likewise, the NCFL helped Toyota create and expand its Family Literacy Program to over 100 schools in 30 cities, including Louisville, to help improve the literacy levels of children and their families so that they can succeed together in school and life. Finally, the NCFL helped create McDonald's Family Mealtime Literacy Nights and the "A Day at Dollar General" online game to show parents how to use household activities, mealtimes and shopping trips to teach their children reading, math, science, how to make a list and budget, etc.

Besides the NCFL and their business partners, there are many other private organizations that have invested in early education, from the United Way, with its Success By 6 program, to major foundations such as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the Wallace Foundation, the Pew Charitable Trusts, and the Clinton Foundation. Kentucky would do well to take advantage of the facts that the NCFL is headquartered in Louisville and that so many private foundations are looking to invest in early education to develop new public-private partnership initiatives.

Public and Private: Where Are the Gaps?

Kentucky's public and private investments in early education have paid off, helping us dramatically improve national K-12 educational rankings from near last to the middle of the pack. Kentucky's Prichard Committee would be the first to note our goal should not be "academic mediocrity" but "academic excellence." This has been the task of the Commonwealth

Policy Institute, which, through in-depth analysis of the impressive work being done in the state and gaps in early education programs, puts forward the following observations:

1. Disadvantaged and minority children often do not have equal access to quality early education programs.
2. Even the largest programs, like Head Start, only reach a small percentage of those eligible.
3. Better professional development could improve some programs' curricula and teaching.
4. Rather than focusing on both hard and soft skills, some programs focus on one or the other.
5. Organizations doing similar work do not always seem to engage in effective collaboration.
6. Even apparently successful programs are shut down for lack of reliable funding.
7. Programs often seem to lack assessment to determine what is working & how to improve.

Although great strides have been made to focus on disadvantaged and minority children, equal access to quality early education remains a challenge. Problems still exist with not only availability of programs but also with quality, lending credence to the need for more professional development opportunities.

Kentucky's Head Start Director, Joe Roberts, says that the federal government only provides enough funding to educate 40% of the children below the poverty line, with states making up the difference as best they can. For that reason and others, among eligible children in poverty only 40% are in Head Start and only a paltry 4% are in Early Head Start. In fact, Roberts noted that in one county the number of kids on the Head Start waiting list (95) actually exceeded the total number of kids served by Head Start (85). Moreover, half of Kentucky's preschool-aged children are not in any kind of preschool, so their parents or babysitters are their only teachers. As a result, if these parents or babysitters are unaware of their role as teachers or unprepared to play this role, many of Kentucky's children will arrive in kindergarten far behind their peers.

Prichard Committee Executive Director Stu Silberman and President /CEO of The Collaborative for Teaching and Learning Deborah Walker, Ed.D. both stress the importance of ongoing professional development and mentoring. Kentucky seems to be ramping up its efforts in this area through its five regional training centers, its Training into Practice Project, and its

Quality Enhancement Initiative. And, as previously mentioned, while HB 234 will help to standardize both public and private pre-school programs, disparity still exists.

As Heckman and other revelatory research shows before age five, learning soft skills like determination and resiliency can be at least as important as learning hard skills like reading and math in determining children's future success in school, work, and life. Some parents, for instance non-native English speakers, who may doubt their ability to teach their kids hard skills like reading and speaking in English, may feel validated when they learn that it is at least as important that they teach their kids the other skills. CPI recommends – whether designed to train early educators or parents – programs should emphasize how to teach children both hard and soft skills. In the early childhood education collaborations mentioned above, public entities often collaborated with other public entities and private entities often collaborated with other private entities, as with the NCFL's and its many business partners. Public-private partnership collaborations seem rare, with notable exceptions like the Bornlearning Academies®, which we will discuss later.

Even successful programs are often shut down because they lack reliable funding. For instance, Toyota will no longer be investing money in the Family Literacy Program that NCFL helped it create, not because the program was unsuccessful, but because Toyota wants to shift more of its public service investments to other projects like the Bornlearning Academies®. Most businesses and foundations seem to prefer investing in new initiatives for a few years to help the programs get up and running and to give them a chance to prove themselves. Then, in their view, if the initiative is really working well and serving the public, the federal, state, or local government(s) will step in to fund it and even scale it up. In a perfect world, that would happen but, unfortunately, governments do not always have the money or the mandate to take over such programs and, as a result, some successful initiatives just die.

Early education is so important to children's mental and psychosocial development, that programs should incorporate regular assessment to determine what kids are learning and what they are not so that the programs can be continuously improved. Ultimately, assessment is also essential to making informed decisions about which educational experiments should be abandoned and which should be scaled up. Finally, assessment is critical to convincing governments and foundations that programs are really working so that, when businesses are

ready to shift their investments to new projects, a government or foundation will be there to fund the existing successful project and even scale it up.

BLA'S: A Kentucky Public – Private Partnership That Works

Bornlearning Academies® (BLAs) are a result of collaboration between Toyota, the United Way's Success By 6 program, the Prichard Committee, Northern Kentucky University (NKU)'s Early Childhood Center, Kentucky's Family Resource Centers (FRCs), and more than 20 of Kentucky's public schools. This impressive initiative is an excellent example of a cost-effective, public-private partnership which could be easily replicated in more Kentucky schools. Toyota of North America's Former Manager of Community Relations Helen Carroll explains that then-Kenton County Superintendent Tim Hanner adapted the successful Harlem Children's Zone's "Baby College" model to create the first BLA, and Toyota, United Way and Kentucky's FRCs helped bring BLAs to more than 20 schools.

BLAs help parents get their children ready for kindergarten. In Kentucky, half of children under five are not in preschool, making it essential that parents learn how to teach their children. BLAs work with FRCs to identify pre-school aged kids and invite them and their parents to their future elementary schools for six monthly sessions. During these sessions, kids get used to coming to school and parents learn different age-appropriate activities they can use around the house and while shopping to teach verbal, reading and math skills. For example, at the grocery store parents can talk to their children about the colors, shapes and textures of different fruits and vegetables, how to spell them, pricing and numbers, etc. The sessions also provide parents with information on how to improve the family's nutrition, sleep and health. Finally, each six-month BLA includes pre- and post-testing for the children that covers both hard, cognitive skills and soft, psychosocial skills. This helps determine what the children learned and what they did not, so that the BLA can be continuously improved in line with Toyota's ethos.

The cost to create a new BLA at the relatively modest amount of $11,500 covers a BLA trainer (most who are from NKU), educational materials, testing, and meals for the parents and students, childcare for babies, and incentives like gift certificates for healthy foods. After the first year, once the BLA trainer has trained a few teachers to run the BLA sessions, the yearly

cost drops to $5,000-$6,000 or even less when local grocery stores and/or restaurants agree to provide food and/or gift certificates for free or at a reduced cost.

BLAs address at least six of the seven identified gaps: equal access (they serve schools from inner cities and rural areas); reach (they reach those not in Head Start or other preschools); professional development (BLA trainers train teachers to run the academies); hard and soft skills (they teach parents how to teach both); collaboration (they let several partners focus on what they do best); and assessment (they use pre- and post-testing to insure continuous improvement). As for reliable funding, Toyota and the United Way generously have borne most of the BLAs' costs, but, in order to create even more BLAs, state or foundation funding is crucial. Fortunately, BLAs have been collecting the kind of assessment data for making a compelling case to potential funders.

Potential Public - Private Partnerships

To address educating parents and other caregivers to better prepare children for school, the Governor's Office of Early Childhood could convene representatives from the various public and private organizations that are already helping to teach parents how to teach their children (BLAs, GCIPL, the NCFL, Kentucky's Family Resource Centers, college Child and Family Studies departments, etc.). Next, these representatives could outline what parents need to learn in order to teach their young children the hard and soft skills they need to be ready for kindergarten. Then these representatives could meet with programmers from Public Broadcasting Systems (PBS) /Kentucky Educational Television to devise a TV series or series of public service announcements that explain to parents the importance of and how best to teach their kids these essential skills. While the PBS website already has some good information in this area, broadcasting has the potential to reach a lot more parents. PBS/KET videos should also be posted to YouTube. Some of the best ideas from Verizon's Wonderopolis® and Thinkfinity websites, Toyota's Family Literacy Program, McDonald's Family Mealtime Literacy Nights, the "Day at Dollar General" online game, etc. could be incorporated. These companies could be encouraged to become sponsors of the series/PSAs, while simultaneously making more families aware of their existing educational resources. Finally, hospitals could inform new and expectant parents of the importance of serving as their children's first teachers, letting them know about all the resources available to them on TV and online.

Like BLAs, this one strategy addresses almost all of the gaps: equal access (even most poor families can watch KET, and many do); reach (it reaches those not in Head Start or other preschools); professional development (it teaches parents how to become better teachers); hard and soft skills (it teaches parents how to teach both); collaboration (it lets several partners focus on what they do best); and reliable funding (it provides a way to attract multiple corporate sponsors).

Moving Forward to Fill These Gaps

First and foremost, regarding reach and equal access, Kentucky should follow the lead of New York, New Jersey, Illinois, California, Florida, Georgia, Oklahoma, and other states in moving toward universal, voluntary preschool for four years-olds. Even though most of these states' per capita incomes are greater than Kentucky's ($23,210), Georgia ($25,309) and Oklahoma ($24,046) have been offering voluntary, universal preschool for four-year olds since 1995 and 1998, respectively. The three states whose incomes are most similar to Kentucky's pay are between $2400 (Florida) and $3500 (Oklahoma) per student. This investment allows them to attract up to $7700 per student from the federal Head Start program, as well as substantial investments from businesses and foundations, so the states are getting all of the benefits of these universal preschool programs while paying as little as 20% of the cost (Khimm; Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning). Because voluntary participation rates tend to rise gradually – in the case of Oklahoma from 5% the first year to 75% after 15 years – this allows states to slowly shift money from other parts of the education budget (remedial courses, special education, etc.). Many states are so committed in this area that they find other revenue streams to help fund early education immediately. Georgia, for instance, uses some of its state lottery profits to fund universal pre-K. If Kentucky decides to adopt race-track casinos, those profits could be used for this effort.

Regarding assessment, Kentucky could fully implement the proven Head Start assessment regime that it has only recently tried to extend to other preschools and childcare facilities through Early Childhood Standards and STARS for KIDS NOW. Kentucky also recently piloted the Common Kindergarten Entry Screener, which is used to screen all entering kindergarteners for establishing entry levels and to start early interventions and measure success. The screener uses a "whole child" definition of school readiness that includes five developmental

areas: 1. approaches to learning; 2. social and emotional development; 3. health and physical wellbeing; 4. Cognitive and general knowledge; and 5. language and communication development. A question could be added to the parent questionnaire asking for the names of the preschool or daycare center that their child regularly attends, so the state can give each preschool and daycare center aggregate feedback on how well prepared their graduates were for kindergarten in each of these five areas.

Regarding professional development, two experts – Executive Director of the Prichard Committee Stu Silberman, and President/CEO of the Collaborative for Teaching and Learning Deborah Walker, Ed.D. – both stress mentoring as essential to ensure that new teachers receive ongoing professional development, and encouragement to stick with the profession long enough so that they become even better teachers. Mentoring and mentor-training programs should be extended to all private preschools and daycares, offering their leaders the opportunity to participate in some facets of Head Start's existing mentor-training programs. Improved mentoring would improve teaching and retention rates, thereby minimizing the amount of the time the leaders spend interviewing and training new teachers. In turn, this would improve students' learning, thereby allowing these preschools to perform better on Kentucky's new quality ratings.

Regarding collaboration, reliable funding and assessment, the possibilities are limitless. They could include using professors or graduate students in departments of Education or Child & Family Studies – who need material for articles, conference presentations and theses – to assess experimental programs at cost. Assessment results could: 1. help the organization further improve a promising program; 2. keep the organization from throwing good money after bad; 3. give the organization evidence it needs to convince the government or a foundation to help it expand a successful program.

Another possibility is multi-powered, public-private partnerships involving not only governments and businesses, but also some combination of foundations, colleges and universities, hospitals, PBS/KET and other private organizations, like the Prichard Committee and the NCFL. These partnerships would be "multi-powered" because of their sheer diversity and ability to do multiple things well at once, meaning each organization can focus on what it does best. Businesses could innovate and implement new initiatives, colleges and universities could help with background research and assessment, PBS/KET could help bring successful initiatives to a wider public, and governments could help coordinate these efforts.

Recommendations

- **Kentucky's legislature should vote to offer voluntary, universal preschool to all four-year-olds.** Although Kentucky has made huge advancements in offering universal preschool for all four year olds, political leaders, business leaders and our citizens must embrace this initiative if we are to educate the next generation successfully.

- **The Governor's Office of Childhood Education should work to foster even greater collaboration between the various government agencies, educational institutions, corporations, and other private organizations that are already working on early childhood education.** Public and private partnerships have demonstrated success in Kentucky already. The Governor's Office for Early Childhood could replicate those programs and develop new partnerships far beyond the current status.

- **Kentucky's Department of Education should use its new Common Kindergarten Entry Screener to determine which preschools and day care centers seem to be doing the best job of preparing children and to disseminate their best practices.**

- **The Governor's Office of Early Childhood should ensure that all programs to train early educators or parents explicitly target both hard and soft skills.**

- **Kentucky's Head Start Collaboration Office should make every effort to open up Head Start training to teachers and administrators from Kentucky's private preschools and day care centers.** Kentucky must expand facets of Head Start's existing training programs to private preschools and day care centers.

- **Kentucky should create incentives for early childhood teachers and administrators to participate in ongoing professional development. Kentucky's legislature, corporate sponsors, and/or other private organizations should help defray the costs, the Governor's Office of Early Childhood should issue certificates for successful completion of training, and the Cabinet for Health and Family Services should count professional development in its STARS ratings.** Incentives or mandates should be provided for early educators in regard to participation in professional-development programs.

- **To ensure quality and accountability, Kentucky's legislature should vote to expand the STARS rating system to include all public and private preschools and day care centers.**

PROCESS SUMMARY

After reviewing more than thirty-five possible educational issues, the Commonwealth Policy Institute's Sub-Committee on Education determined to focus on early childhood education for further study and research. Our thinking was guided by recent conversations around the Commonwealth and nation regarding the importance of early childhood (ages 0-3) initiatives.

We began our investigation by listening to early childhood experts within the state and around the country. The consultants suggested that we "Reflect, Research, and Recommend," forming the sub-committee's decision to center on the three "R's" in developing its approach to writing the white paper on early childhood education. The reflection resulted in a review of the history of current and past early childhood initiatives. For the research, the committee reviewed the most recent as well as some of the more established and respected studies to gain a knowledge foundation in this area. Lastly, our committee proposed recommendations. It was our intent to create a document that would provoke discussion and action in both the community and the legislative arena.

One of the guiding principles of this white paper was to follow Albert Einstein's suggestion: "Everything should be made as simple as possible, but not simpler." We recognized that any study of an educational issue with accompanying recommendations could be challenged by others because of the complexity of the subject matter; however, the subcommittee felt it was important to lend its voice to this very important issue in simple, insightful, straightforward observations.

Questions addressed within this paper are:

- What would be the return on investment by encouraging increased spending on early childhood educational activities?
- How should the state continue to involve parents and the community at large in the effort to provide universal pre-school education?
- How do we continue to effectively engage new public/private partnerships to strengthen early childhood education?
- How do we get and keep policy makers from both parties committed to supporting new policy initiatives to strengthen early childhood funding?

The white paper is not intended to be all-inclusive, but it is intended to shed new light on early-childhood issues. With the assistance of thirteen consultants, our subcommittee was presented with a wealth of information which not only enlightened us, but inspired us, as well.

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- Brandy Bailey— Retirement Solutions Representative, Winchester
- Pat Esrael—Retired teacher, Fayette County Schools, Lexington
- Marty Lanus—Retired journalist, Shelbyville
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- Stu Silberman—Executive Director of the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence
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