

Early Education Commission

A community leadership collaborative supporting the United Way's goal of ensuring children are ready for school



United Way of
Metropolitan Atlanta

Research Abstract

Title: “The Science of Early Childhood Development: Closing the Gap Between What We Know and What We Do”

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Abstract

In this paper the authors discuss cumulative knowledge about brain development based on decades of research in various fields, including neuroscience and developmental psychology. Based on their review of this research, the authors developed a set of “Core Concepts of Development.” Essentially, these concepts state that

- Child development is a foundation for community development and economic development.
- The interactive influences of genes and experience literally shape the architecture of the developing brain; the active ingredient is the “serve and return” nature of children’s engagement in relationships with parents and other caregivers.
- Both brain architecture and developing abilities are built “from the bottom up,” with simple circuits and skills providing the scaffolding for more advanced circuits and skills over time.
- Toxic stress in early childhood can damage developing brain architecture and lead to lifelong problems in learning, behavior, and both physical and mental health.
- Creating the right conditions for early childhood development is likely to be more effective and less costly than addressing problems at a later age.

The authors recommend that policy initiatives:

- Promote supportive relationships and rich learning opportunities for young children
- Encourage growth-promoting experiences through a range of parent education, family support, early care and education, preschool, and intervention services
- Encourage caregivers to attend to young children’s emotional and social needs as well as their mastery of literacy and cognitive skills to have maximum impact on the development of sturdy brain architecture and preparation for success in school
- Provide for basic health and early childhood programs that monitor the development of all children to identify and address problems in a timely fashion
- Provide appropriate intervention at a younger age

- Provide substantial investments in training, recruiting, compensating and retaining a high quality workforce due to the shortage of well-trained personnel in the field
- Focus on benefits relative to cost; seek maximum value rather than minimal cost

The authors conclude that, “the time has come to close the gap between what we know (from systematic scientific inquiry across a broad range of disciplines) and what we do (through both public and private sector policies and practices) to promote the healthy development of all young children.”