

Early Education Commission

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



Research Abstract

Title: “A Science-Based Framework for Early Childhood Policy: “Using Evidence to Improve Outcomes in Learning, Behavior and Health for Vulnerable Children”

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Abstract

This paper builds on the authors’ earlier work, “Closing the Gap Between What We Know and What We Do.” In reviewing brain development concepts they note that “Early experiences determine whether a child’s developing brain architecture provides a strong or weak foundation for all future learning, development and health.”

The authors then review and discuss more fully early intervention program evaluations of the past few decades. Based on their review, the authors identify “effectiveness factors” from programs that demonstrated a positive impact on child development/outcomes. Briefly, these factors include:

- Access to basic medical care for children and pregnant women
- Intensive home visitation for vulnerable mothers expecting their first child
- High-quality, center-based early education programs for children from low-income families
- Programs that provide direct supports for parents and high-quality, center-based care and education for children in families experiencing significant diversity
- Intensive services matched to specific problems for children experiencing toxic stress from recurrent abuse or neglect, severe maternal depression, parental substance abuse or family violence
- Work-based income supplements for working parents in families living under the poverty level
- Environmental policies that reduce the level of neurotoxins in the environment

The authors point out that “no single approach or mode of service delivery has been shown to be a magic bullet,” but that the basic concepts of neuroscience and child development remain valid regardless of program approach. In addition, scaling-up/replicating effective programs, not always effective, requires establishing quality standards and routine monitoring of service delivery. They recommend, “developing new intervention strategies for children and families for whom conventional approaches appear to have minimal impact” and “ongoing, constructive evaluation and continuous program improvement.”