



Statement
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Thank you, Chairman Obey, for inviting me here today. It's an honor to appear before such a wonderful champion of children and the disadvantaged. Thank you, Congressman Jackson, for that kind introduction. Thank you, too, to Congresswoman DeLauro and to the entire Committee for your advocacy on behalf of disadvantaged young children—for all of the wonderful success you've already accomplished this year, and for all that you will do you continue to strive for the very best for our nation's children.

In my day job, I worry non-stop about making wise investments and growing capital. In my philanthropic work, I have the same goals, but I face far less worry and enjoy much more certainty. By supporting early childhood education, I know I'm making an investment in fostering human capital that is guaranteed to pay dividends.

We all know that everyone is born with potential, but we often don't have the facts to say how much society should invest in maximizing potential from an early age—or whether the financial risk makes sense. The work of economists, developmental psychologists, sociologists, statisticians, and neuroscientists provides the answer with decades of research, solid data and multi-disciplinary analysis. Investing in early childhood development for disadvantaged children and their families provides a 10% return on investment through increased personal achievement and social productivity. It improves the health, economic, and social outcomes not just for individuals, but for society at large.

In these complicated and tumultuous times, we face a litany of problems we'd like to fix and goals we'd like to achieve: Fostering economic competitiveness. Achieving better educational outcomes. Increasing the opportunity for health. Reducing crime. Building a capable, productive and competitive workforce. Anyone looking for upstream solutions to the biggest problems facing America should understand the great gains to be had by investing in early and equal development of human potential.

Early childhood development is not just an education issue—it is also a health issue that affects the health of our economy. A vast body of research shows that early childhood development from the ages of zero to five greatly affects cognitive development, social and emotional health, and the ability to learn as a child and later function at a high level as an adult. Effective early childhood development has the potential to reduce teenage pregnancy, crime, and other social burdens while increasing human productivity that drives economic security for all. It will produce a smarter, stronger, healthier, and more

prosperous nation—helping America stay the top competitor in a globally competitive society. In the long run, it will cost us less than it is costing us now to remediate the consequences we suffer by not providing effective early childhood development. Investing early amounts to “fixing it before it’s broken” and gives us better value for the dollars we devote to social supports.

There is evidence that the achievement gap we worry so much about in school-age children actually emerges before children are 18 months old and, without intervention, only continues to widen over time. This, then, is not an “achievement gap”: it’s an opportunity and access gap. When we fail to close this gap and fail to relieve the burden of disadvantage among children, we create costly social burdens that affect us all.

We know our investments need to begin at birth and have a particular focus on infants and toddlers, who currently have the greatest needs and receive the fewest services. The federal government and states have developed a range of programs of differing quality. It is critically important that we look at which programs are most effective and why, and work to implement them where they are needed most. We urge the federal government to work with states to develop comprehensive, high-quality early childhood development programs that are easily accessible and affordable to disadvantaged children and their parents.

Implementing effective early childhood education programs can be done because it is being done—with measurable results. I invest in Educare of Chicago. It’s the gold standard of high quality early education, providing full-day, full-year care and education for disadvantaged children from birth to five with highly-qualified teachers as well as a full range of family supports to help parents be active partners in their children’s development. Educare is a public-private partnership that relies on Head Start, Early Head Start, and child care funding to serve at-risk children. It was built in the shadow of the Robert Taylor Homes public housing project, in what was at the time the poorest census tract in the United States. I’m enormously proud to say that the children who enter Educare when they are very young emerge from the program with vocabularies and school readiness scores that meet and exceed national averages. We put them on a level playing field with advantaged, middle-class children. We closed the achievement gap by closing the opportunity gap.

Thanks to the investments made in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, you have provided a down payment to help serve more children and improve the quality of the education they’re receiving. But there is much more to be done for millions more children in poverty who don’t have access to the early learning opportunities. Closing that disadvantage gap would prove to be of great advantage to all Americans. Please continue to support Head Start, Early Head Start, the Child Care and Development Block Grant, and the President’s Early Learning Challenge Grants.

We don’t have to reinvent the wheel when it comes to effective early childhood development programs, we simply need to get the wheel rolling across America—for the economic benefit of all.