

Strong Foundations Build Strong Futures

Why the Earliest Years Matter Most for Lifelong Outcomes and Michigan's Economy



1 million+ neural connections form every second during early brain development.



Up to \$7 returned for every \$1 invested in high-quality early childhood programs.



4x more likely to graduate high school when children read proficiently by third grade.



Higher lifetime earnings and economic mobility are linked to high-quality early learning.



Better lifelong health outcomes, including lower rates of chronic disease and substance use.

Birth through age 5 is a period of rapid development that cannot be replicated later.

Children's brains develop faster in the first five years than at any other time. Early experiences – positive or negative – become the architecture for future learning, health, and behavior. When systems fail families early, the costs show up later in education, health care, and the justice system.

What happens early shows up later in school, work, and health.

Children who grow up with stable, nurturing early environments are more likely to succeed academically and economically. Early literacy and numeracy skills are strong predictors of third-grade reading proficiency, a key milestone linked to long-term success. These outcomes are shaped not by individual parenting choices alone, but by whether families can access the supports children need during their earliest years.

Investing early costs less and delivers more than trying to fix problems later.

Early childhood investments generate long-term public and private returns because prevention is more cost-effective than remediation. A strong early childhood system supports parents' ability to work, strengthens the current workforce, and builds children's foundational skills at the same time.

Children do best when their families and communities have the support they need.

Parents and caregivers are children's first teachers, but working families can only do so much on their own. Today's economic realities often force families into impossible tradeoffs between work, care, and stability. When families have access to reliable, high quality child care and early supports, they have real choices, which benefits parents' ability to work and helps children thrive.

Sources: [Harvard Center on the Developing Child/First Things First](#); [Heckman Equation/University of Chicago](#); [Abecedarian Early Intervention Project](#) [Annie E. Casey Foundation](#); [Brookings Institution](#) and [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).