

The payback on early learning makes it a dollars and sense proposition [CA-ON] ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

See text below.

EXCERPTS

Since its release, Charles Pascal's report, *With Our Best Future In Mind*, has raised considerable controversy: Supporters are hailing the plan to develop an integrated early-learning framework for young children; critics are claiming it is too costly and interventionist.

Taken on face value, the report seems to focus primarily on the role of government in establishing full-day kindergarten, and in developing an early-learning and child-care system for Ontario. We believe, however, that it reflects sound ideas both about a child's need for both public mechanisms to support early learning, and the central role of the family as the basis for early learning. Early learning is not an either/or - both are necessary. The report recognizes this. It is time the rest of us did, too.

The report's recommendations would involve additional spending. In these economic times, money is scarce, but public spending must reflect our society's priorities. Investments should be made accordingly. In a knowledge-based era, we should be increasing the portion of overall spending that goes to education.

We already know and appreciate the investment value of education, not only to the individual but to society in general: Incomes rise and there is a consequent reduction in a vast array of government support payments over time.

While quality learning can and must therefore take place at all ages, research tells us (as does our experience as parents) that the earliest years are the foundation for life. Investing in early learning should therefore be our educational priority.

Economist James Heckman shared the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2000 for his demonstration of the life cycle as a dynamic process, with each stage underpinning the next. His work shows that public spending in early childhood provides far greater returns than interventions at any other age. He computes the return on investment in early childhood programs at 8:1, compared to a 3:1 return for primary and secondary education and 1:1 for adult training. He also acknowledges that program benefits are most pronounced for disadvantaged children. His position is supported by University of Toronto economists Gordon Cleveland and Michael Krashinsky, who revealed a 2:1 payback for a universal early-childhood program

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Although the province has suggested that their early-learning plan would be implemented first in targeted, high-risk communities, it is important not to lose sight of the value of a universal approach to early learning. Studies show that restricting programs to a defined population or neighbourhood misses the majority of children who need support. We have learned from the National Longitudinal Study on Children and Youth (NLSCY) and the Early Development Instrument (EDI) that, while children showing developmental challenges are more likely to be found in low income and lone-parent families, more than 70 per cent of vulnerable children live in two-parent, non-poor families. It's time to stop the debate and begin to act - now.

- reprinted from the Globe and Mail

Related link: Early Learning Advisor's website ^[2]

Region: Ontario ^[3]

Tags: economics ^[4]

kindergarten ^[5]

full-day early learning ^[6]

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