



Wyoming's Investment in Young Children During the 2011-2012 Biennium

Executive Summary

Wyoming's Investment in Young Children During the 2011-2012 Biennium: Executive Summary

Why should we invest in young children?

From before birth to the first day of kindergarten, a child's mind undergoes the most rapid development of his or her lifetime. There is often a perception that children begin learning in kindergarten, but the truth is that school readiness—and the basis of future cognitive, linguistic, social, emotional and motor abilities—are formed earlier. During the first years of a child's life, neural connections build brain architecture that affects later learning, behavior and health.¹

Because a child's experiences during the earliest years will shape future successes and well-being, dedicating resources to the healthy development of young children ought to be considered an economic development strategy. Nobel prizewinning economist James Heckman found that investments in early childhood produce a higher return on the dollar than other investments in human capital like higher education and job training.² High quality preschool programs, for example, have been shown to reduce crime and the need for social programs and special education for children who participate, while increasing their future earnings and productivity.³ Quality, reliable child care also improves employee productivity, reduces absenteeism and cuts turnover of parents who would otherwise be worried about their children during the day.⁴

To make certain that Wyoming children are prepared for their futures, we must ensure that communities and families work together and have the resources to provide for the healthy development of young children. The Ready Children Equation, adapted from the National School Readiness Initiative to reflect the unique strengths and needs of Wyoming, shows how the elements of the community form an early childhood system that contributes to our children's preparation for success in school and in life:



¹ Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2007). *A Science-Based Framework for Early Childhood Policy: Using Evidence to Improve Outcomes in Learning, Behavior and Health for Vulnerable Children*. <http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu>

² Knudsen, E., Heckman, J., Cameron, J., Shonkoff, J. (2006). *Economic, neurobiological, and behavioral perspectives on building America's future workforce*.

³ Schweinhart, L., Montie, J., Xiang, Z., Barnett, W., Belfield, C., Nores, M. (2005). *Lifetime Effects: The HighScope Perry Preschool Study Through Age 40 (2005)*. Retrieved from http://www.highscope.org/file/Research/PerryProject/specialsummary_rev2011_02_2.pdf

⁴ Shellenback, K. (2004). "Child Care and Parent Productivity: Making the Business Case."

Summary Table—Wyoming's Investment in Early Childhood During the 2011-2012 Biennium

Category	Amount Budgeted (\$)	Percent for Young Children	Total (\$)
Ready Families			
DOH Developmental Disability Waiver	29,668,262	7	2,076,778
DOH Respite Care	150,000	30	45,000
DOH UPLIFT Family Support Program	1,530,000	32	489,600
DOH Community Mental Health and Substance Abuse Centers	1,137,112	100	1,137,112
DFS Protective Services	48,606,915	----	48,606,915
Ready Families Total			\$52,355,405
Ready Health			
DOH Maternal and Family Health	2,400,602	100	2,400,602
DOH WIC Supplemental Nutrition Program	1,573,522	100	1,573,522
DOH Kid Care CHIP	11,271,590	43	4,846,783
DOH Medicaid: Adult	\$68,075,427	100	68,075,427
DOH Medicaid: Children	138,970,857	100	138,970,857
DOH Children's Mental Health Waiver	2,300,000	3	69,000
DOH Oral Health	1,990,285	14	278,640
DOH Immunization	5,700,000	51	2,907,000
DOH Public Health Nursing	2,600,052	100	2,600,052
Ready Health Total			\$221,721,883
Ready Early Care			
DFS Early Childhood Development	16,197,106	100	16,197,106
DOA Consumer Health Services	3,788,047	4	151,522
DWS WY Quality Counts!	2,500,999	100	2,500,999
DOH Developmental Preschools	68,269,510	100	68,269,510
Ready Early Care Total			\$87,119,137
Ready Schools			
DOE Early Learning	199,639	100	199,639
DOE Reading Assessment	356,232	100	356,232
DOE Early Learning Assessment	500,940	100	500,940
DOE Child Nutrition Grants	70,000	100	70,000
Ready Schools Total			\$1,126,811
Ready Communities			
Ready Communities Total	----	----	----
Grand Total			\$362,323,236

About This Report

Wyoming does not have a definitive, comprehensive account method to show exactly how much it invests in its youngest citizens; this research establishes an estimate of that amount.

Wyoming Kids First defines early childhood as the prenatal period through age eight. However, because children generally begin public education around age five, and due to the difficulty of separating out the funding that benefits children to age eight within the public education system, this report focuses on spending that benefits children from the prenatal period through age five or school entry, unless otherwise noted.

While state agencies and programs have other sources of revenue besides their state-allocated funds (notably federal funds), the purpose of this report is to establish an estimate for the State of Wyoming's dollar investment in early childhood. Programs and services funded solely by sources other than state funds *are not* included in this report. Some programs are funded by state and other funds, but only the allocated state funds are included here.

Although the figures compiled are estimates, this research serves as a starting point for continued dialogue about the future of young children in Wyoming—and by extension, the future of Wyoming itself. By investing now in our youngest children, we begin to strengthen the workforce of 2030 and beyond.

A few interesting comparisons can be made from the data in the report:

- Wyoming spends about ten times as much per student on K-12 education as on early education.⁵
- Wyoming spends about thirteen times more⁶ on education per University of Wyoming student than per child ages birth to five on early education.
- When the seven community colleges⁷ are factored in to the higher education pool, Wyoming spends about seven times as much per student on higher education as on early education.

The return on investment in human capital is largest when the investment is made in the earliest years.⁸ While quality elementary, secondary and higher education are very important for Wyoming, investing more in quality early learning would yield a higher return on public funds in the form of students who are prepared for success on the first day of kindergarten, and who would continue to perform well throughout their lives.

Investing in young children requires more than a five- or ten-year plan; it requires a long-term vision of Wyoming's success that prioritizes healthy, successful families. As Wyoming plans for the years ahead, we must consider children's needs so that they will grow and develop to be successful adults who are capable of managing challenges and contributing to society. When we prioritize children, we prioritize our future.

⁵ Expenditures per student on early education calculated using the Ready Early Care total and the number of children under age five in the 2010 Census.

⁶ Cost per UW student calculated using the dollar amount allocated to UW from the 2011-2012 general fund (\$358,416,530) and the number of students (13,000 according to uwo.edu).

⁷ The Community College Commission's 2011-2012 general fund budget was \$228,575,638, and the community colleges served 26,275 students in 2008-'09.

⁸ Heckman, J. "Schools, Skills and Synapses." Retrieved from <http://www.heckmanequation.org/content/resource/presenting-heckman-equation>