

Research on early learning shows economic payoff

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An anti-crime organization made up of law enforcement, prosecutors and survivors of violence has issued a series of reports for different states on the importance of quality early childhood programs. To make its point, the group, Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, chronicles some of the most prominent studies:

— A study in a small Southern town found that 112 poor children who participated in a full-day, enriched program from birth to age 5 were nearly three times as likely to be attending a four-year college at age 21. Those who didn't participate had lower IQ scores at age 12, were 91 percent more likely to fail a grade and dropped out almost 50 percent more often.

— The High/Scope Perry Preschool Program for at-risk 3- and 4-year-olds in Michigan was the subject of a long-term study since 1962. The research found that children who participated were 44 percent more likely to graduate from high school. Children in the control group who did not attend the program not only performed at a lower level in school, they were five times more likely to become chronic lawbreakers by age 27 than children who attended the program. By age 40, those who didn't participate were twice as likely to be arrested for violent crimes and four times more likely to be arrested for drug felonies.

The study found that the program cut crime, welfare and other costs enough to save taxpayers more than \$16 for every \$1 invested.

— A study of a similar publicly funded program in Chicago tracked 989 participants and 550 similar children who were not enrolled. Those who didn't participate were 67 percent more likely to fail a grade and 71 percent more likely to be placed in special education classes. By their 18th birthdays, they were 70 percent more likely to be arrested for a violent crime.

— A 2004 Columbia University report found that an initial investment in a high-quality early child care program led to taxpayer savings of almost \$3,000 to about \$9,500 per child within 10 years of starting school, mostly by decreasing the rate of students who fail or need special education support.

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