

High-Quality Early Childhood Education

The business case for early childhood investments in Mississippi

A skilled, productive workforce is essential for a strong Mississippi economy. High-quality early childhood education (ECE) supports this workforce now and into the future.

Seventy percent of Mississippi children under age six—roughly 142,000 children total—have parents working outside the home; yet, many of these children are not in high-quality ECE programs.¹ This lack of access and quality is detrimental to parents' work productivity and puts our future workforce at risk.

Brain development from birth to age 5 sets the foundation for children's future success.² Young children's brains develop one million synapses—neural connections that support learning and skills—every second.³ Further, early childhood is a time when children acquire the foundation of many skills needed for 21st-century jobs, including both cognitive and character skills.⁴ It is therefore essential that early care and education consist of responsive, high-quality environments that nurture optimal brain development and promote cognitive and socioemotional growth. In addition, parents need high-quality ECE programs so they can work and support their families. Employers need engaged, productive employees who are not distracted by concerns about their children's well-being during the work day.

However, the current ECE system does not fully meet the needs of Mississippi families or employers. Nearly half (48 percent) of Mississippians live in a child care desert, defined as an area in which there are at least three children for every licensed child care slot.⁵

High-quality, affordable early education can support a productive workforce—both now and into the future

Research demonstrates that high-quality early childhood education benefits the current

“ Investments in high-quality early childhood education are essential to support our children's success in school and longer term in the workplace.”



— Edmond E. Hughes,
Vice President, HR&A
Ingalls Shipbuilding

workforce and bolsters academic outcomes that aid the future workforce. For example:

- Children who attended Mississippi's Title I-funded preschools were 1.5 times more likely to be reading proficiently in third grade than similar peers.⁶ Reading proficiency in third grade is, in turn, associated with higher levels of high school graduation.⁷
- A longitudinal study of more than 1,300 children found that children in higher-quality child care were better prepared for school at age four compared to children in lower-quality child care. At age 15, they

were still performing slightly above their peers.⁸

Business Leaders Can Make a Difference Using Their Influence, Time, and Voice

Mississippi business leaders can help support early childhood investments in myriad ways. They can discuss their support of early childhood as a workforce and economic development strategy with other business leaders. They can advocate for public investments in early childhood with policymakers and can get involved in the support for early childhood in their local communities.

¹ <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/>

² <https://www.nap.edu/read/9824/chapter/1>

³ <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/inbrief-science-of-eecd/>

⁴ <https://www.nap.edu/resource/19401/ProfKnowCompFINAL.pdf>

⁵ http://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Mississippi_YB2019.pdf; <https://childcaredeserts.org/?state=MS>

⁶ <https://www.fcru.ssrc.msstate.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Increasing-the-Odds-Final-Web-Version.pdf>

⁷ <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED518818.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2938040/>

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