

## Key Messages by Audience: Policymakers, Business Leaders, Influencers

*In addition to these parent- and caregiver-specific messages, general messages from the “About Social-emotional Development and IECMH” document, as well as “Metaphors that Increase Understanding of Social-emotional Development and IECMH” will also be useful for this audience.*

- Parents play the most important role in their children’s healthy development. Young children learn, grow and thrive in strong families – but all families need support from the community to be successful.
  - Leaders and policymakers have the opportunity to nurture strong families and help young children thrive through enacting policies that address basic needs, family leave, child welfare, mental health screening, and effective support programs, including home visiting.
  - In more than half of households, all parents work, making the availability of high-quality infant and toddler care critical. As a society, we all have a responsibility to ensure that very young children have access to high-quality child care environments while their parents work.
- The first three years of a child’s life are a critical window of opportunity to make sure the next generation of workers, leaders and community members has the strongest possible foundation for success.
- Whether or not we have children of our own, we all play an important role in giving children a strong start in life.
- The foundation for lifelong health and well-being is established in early childhood. The science is clear, showing how children’s emotional well-being can be both strengthened and disrupted early in life. The strong scientific base provides us with the knowledge we need to make smart investment in programs and policies that work to improve outcomes for young children facing significant adversity.
  - Ensuring the healthy development of our community’s youngest children requires innovative solutions and extensive collaboration. Many states and communities have designed solutions to effectively address serious risk factors in early childhood, leading to long-term improvements for children and cost savings for communities.
  - These evidence-based programs must be replicated in communities across the country with the support of policies and public investment that prioritize the

well-being of young children and their families. Indeed, the societal benefit of these programs far exceeds the costs of the programs themselves.

- Programs that improve the experiences of children early in life have been studied by researchers and economists and bring a significant return on investment. Quality early childhood programs have been shown to reduce costs associated with societal problems ranging from dropping out of high school to crime to homelessness and substance abuse.
  - Investments in the healthy development of the next generation will be paid back in the form of responsible and productive citizens, who themselves, are better prepared to raise their own children and perpetuate a cycle of success.
  - Decades of economic research demonstrates that for every dollar invested in early childhood programs, there is a future savings of between \$3 and \$17<sup>1</sup>. This is because intervening early to support children who are at risk helps promote school completion, a strong workforce, higher earnings, stronger social attachments, lower crime rate, and reduced dependence on public assistance.
- Recent research from Nobel Prize-winning economist James Heckman suggests that the benefits of quality early childhood programs are even greater when children are enrolled earlier in their lives. Heckman's latest research found that children who attended high-quality early care and education programs from infancy had higher IQs and were healthier throughout their lives than children who stayed home or attended low-quality programs.

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<sup>1</sup> Zero to Three, Infant and Toddler Messaging Guide, 2015; retrieved from <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/479-infant-and-toddler-messaging-guide>