

Engaging Governors in Early Learning

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Engaging Governors in Early Learning

Three Key Lessons

- ❑ Engaging governors in early learning requires attention to three lessons from the early learning field:
 - I. Starting early matters
 - II. Teacher quality matters
 - III. The other kids in the sandbox matter

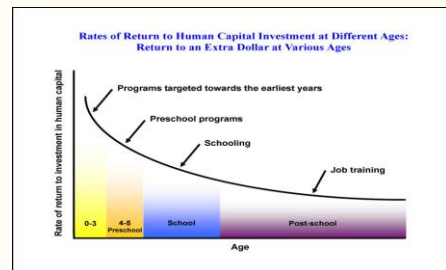
2

I. Starting Early Matters

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Starting Early Matters

Research shows that early investment in children is most effective

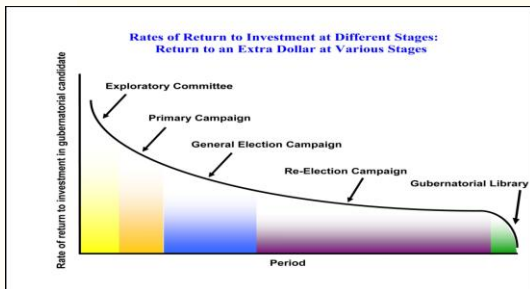


SOURCE: Investing in Disadvantaged Young Children is Good Economics and Good Public Policy, James A. Heckman, Testimony before the Joint Economic Committee, Washington, DC, June 23, 2007

4

Starting Early Matters

Experience teaches that early investment in governors is most effective



5

Starting Early Matters

How to reach governors early

- ❑ Early investment is the only way to ensure inclusion in a new or re-elected governor's mandate.
- ❑ Be fully bipartisan in your initial approach. Make early learning issue on which all candidates can agree.
- ❑ Early investment in governors need not simply be financial - successful advocacy groups invest the time to educate candidates about early childhood issues.
- ❑ Look for early opportunities to access a candidate/governor. Campaigns will typically have education advisory committees, and governor-elects will have education transition teams.

6

II. Teacher Quality Matters

Teacher Quality Matters

A new study shows that teacher-child interaction is the key to learning

- ❑ Pre-k programs "benefit children most when they experience instructionally and emotionally supportive interactions with their teachers," according to a release from the authors of a new University of Virginia study published by *Child Development*, "Measures of Classroom Quality in Pre-Kindergarten and Children's Development of Academic, Language, and Social Skills."
- ❑ "We found that children developed greater academic and language skills in classrooms with higher-quality instructional interactions and greater social skills in classrooms with higher-quality emotional interactions," said lead researcher Andrew J. Mashburn.

Teacher Quality Matters

Who delivers the message to the governor makes a difference

- ❑ In every state, there are some people who call governors and don't get their calls returned; some who have the judgment not to call the governor, knowing that their calls won't be returned; some people who the governor calls back; and some people who the governor reaches out to affirmatively.
- ❑ In most states, the majority of experts in early childhood development and policy will fall into the first two categories.
- ❑ For governors to truly commit to this issue, they may need to hear about its importance from people who were already on their call list - typically high-powered civic leaders.

Teacher Quality Matters

Who delivers the message to the governor makes a difference

- ❑ Some people simply don't know how to talk to governors. Make sure that whoever does can have a "high-quality instructional interaction" with the governor.
- ❑ The initial messengers don't have to know every detail about the state's offerings and potential plans; that can come in follow-up.
- ❑ Advocates with access to the governor need to have regular communication with advocates and policymakers who don't - be a team.

III. The Other Kids in the Sandbox Matter

The Other Kids in the Sandbox Matter

Build relationships with governors by helping them succeed in their context

- ❑ Gubernatorial leadership has been an essential element of early learning expansion in states across the country. But governors can't do it alone.
- ❑ Some governors will want to be intimately involved in the details of fashioning an early childhood program; others will prefer to focus on a larger vision, leaving the details to surrogates. Either way, outside civic leaders can provide crucial support.
- ❑ Civic leaders also have the opportunity to help committed governors with a wide range of audiences, including the legislature, the media, and the general public.

The Other Kids in the Sandbox Matter

There are many actors needed to support governor's commitment

- ❑ Be conscious of the many people around a governor whose work is necessary to develop a high-quality early learning agenda: legislators, gubernatorial staff, state agencies, and the state advisory council.
- ❑ **Legislators:** Civic leaders with gubernatorial access should be able to access top legislative leaders as well. It's imperative that legislative leaders understand the importance of high-quality early learning.
 - Even when governors and legislators are members of the same party, they will have some amount of institutional friction. Outside advocates can help impress upon both parties the importance of not letting the early childhood agenda get caught up in larger debates.

13



The Other Kids in the Sandbox Matter

There are many actors needed to support governor's commitment

- ❑ **Gubernatorial staff:** Gubernatorial staff don't always know what their boss has committed to. They will also vary widely in their ability to move an agenda. At the very least, pay attention to them to ensure that they are aware of the issue's importance, and positioned to assist to the best of their ability.
- ❑ **State agencies:** Typically a host of state agencies will be involved in providing service to young children. Some may be under gubernatorial control, but not always - and the level of gubernatorial control and coordination may vary. Several states have seen promising initiatives ground down by state agencies that weren't properly invested in early childhood. Advocates need to ensure that state agencies have the knowledge and resources they need to implement a high-quality system.

14



The Other Kids in the Sandbox Matter

There are many actors needed to support governor's commitment

- ❑ **State advisory council:** All states are now required to have a State Advisory Council, created by the Head Start reauthorization. These councils will not focus exclusively on Head Start, but will be coordinating bodies for state early childhood programs.
 - These councils will often be forums where people with a wide range of policy and political expertise come together to formulate a common agenda.
 - Civic leaders can engage Councils through direct participation, through grants to support the work of Councils, or through grants to support organizations representing key perspectives on a council.

15



Conclusion

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Key Takeaways

How to engage governors in early learning

- ❑ Governors have been essential leaders of the early childhood agenda in states around the country.
- ❑ Don't wait until they get elected - reach out to candidates to get them involved early.
- ❑ Make sure the people accessing the candidate/governor directly are people whose message will sink in.
- ❑ Don't just focus on the governor - pay attention to the context in which the governor operates.

17

