

Early Intervention in the District of Columbia

DC's Young Children are at High Risk for Delay and Disability

Years of research show that a child's earliest experiences play a critical role in brain development.¹ Children's development is influenced by a wide range of biological and environmental factors, some of which protect and enhance their development while others compromise their developmental outcomes. Preterm birth, low birth weight, and persistent "toxic" stress, such as poverty or abuse and neglect, are examples of the factors that can damage the child's development, leading to lifelong problems in learning, behavior, and physical and mental health.^{2,3,4}

In the District of Columbia:

- 1 in 10 babies are born preterm;⁵
- 1 in 10 babies are born with low birthweight;⁶
- 42% of young children, under age 3, live in low-income families;⁷ and
- 22% of young children, under age 3, are victims of maltreatment.⁸

Early Intervention Services are Essential for Later Success

High quality IDEA Part C early intervention services to young children who have or are at risk for developmental delays have been shown to positively impact outcomes across developmental domains, including health,⁹ language and communication,¹⁰ cognitive development,¹¹ and social/emotional development.¹² Early intervention services help the majority of children catch up to peers.¹³ Families benefit from early intervention by being able to better meet their children's special needs from an early age and throughout their lives. Additionally, early intervention services reduce economic burden through a decreased need for special education.¹⁴

Children who do not receive the specialized support they need as infants and toddlers have a much harder time making up lost ground later.¹⁵ However, when young children do receive the supports they need, the payoffs are enormous. Research on early intervention programs shows that they produce long-lasting and substantial gains in outcomes, such as special education placement, grade retention, high school graduation rates, labor market outcomes, social welfare program use, and crime.^{16, 17}

Fund the Expansion of the DC Early Intervention Program

For too long, DC's Early Intervention Program has not reached as many children and families as it should. Despite the serious risk factors facing DC children, the program has helped less than three percent of young children.¹⁸ In November 2014, the DC Council passed legislation to expand early intervention to children with mild-moderate delays of 25%, but the expansion will only go into effect if funded. As many as 3,000 more District children and families per year will become eligible for services to close the gap in their development before they get to school. Services will be able to go into the home or into daycares, thus helping teach and train families and child care providers about ways to improve development for these children.

Evidence is strong that early intervention works to get many children up to average development and reduces need for special education services and other services later in childhood. The expansion of the DC Early Intervention Program needs funding to change the trajectories of the thousands of additional children and families it was intended to help.

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