

# **Looking into the Imperative of Creating Universal High Quality Early Childhood Education in Ventura County: *An Essential Step towards Creating A Better Tomorrow for All***

A Study Proposal Prepared by:  
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## **1) Why We Need High Quality Early Childhood Education:**

The idea of children are the future is not a cliché. It is one of the most important elements of creating a better tomorrow for all. The skill sets for enhancing the future chance of a child to enjoy a good life, become a productive individual, be a healthy person, emotionally balanced, and socially engaged are increasingly becoming a multifaceted subject attracting a growing body of theoretical and empirical research and investigation from a number of pertinent disciplines.

The first step towards having the chance of living a good life, when a young child grows up begins with enjoying a health and balanced childhood. There is no point to deny that poor and low-income children are less likely to be successful in school. They are more likely to have poorer health, and more likely to engage in crime and other problem behavior later in life. While it is vitally important to reduce and eventually eliminate poverty, it is utterly important to take the necessary steps to pave the path for children of low-income families to have a good start from conception to age five. The following present the essence of five most thought provoking studies on early childhood and what they entail about the essential role of early childhood development in creating a better tomorrow for all (University of Harvard Center on Developing Child):

- In the first few years of life, more than 1 million new neural connections are formed every second. These connections build brain architecture, the foundation upon which all later learning, behavior, and health depend.<sup>1</sup>
- Barriers to children's educational achievement start early, and continue to grow without intervention. Differences in the size of children's vocabulary first appear at 18 months of age. They depend on whether the children are born into a family with high education and income or low education and income. By age 3, children with college-educated parents or primary caregivers had vocabularies 2 to 3 times larger than those whose parents had not completed high school. By the time these children reach school, they are already behind their peers unless they are engaged in a language-rich environment early in life.
- Significant adversity impairs development in the first three years of life. The greater the adversity a child faces the greater will be the odds for a developmental delay. We need to know that poverty, caregiver mental risk illness, child maltreatment, having single parents, low educational attainment of parents expose children to additional risks

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<sup>1</sup> Studies show that 80% of core brain development occurs when a child reaches age 3 and by 5 years of age, 90% of the brain development is completed.

causing a 90 to 100% likelihood of one or more delay in their cognitive, language, or emotional development.

- Early experiences actually get into the body, with lifelong effects, not just on cognitive and emotional development, but on long-term physical health as well. A growing body of evidence now links significant adversity in childhood to increased risk of a range of adult health problems, including diabetes, hypertension, stroke, obesity, and some forms of cancer.
- Providing young children with a healthy environment in which to learn and grow is not only good for their development but high quality early childhood programs bring impressive returns on investment (ROI) to the public. Three of the most rigorous long-term studies found a range of returns between \$4 and \$9 for every dollar invested in early learning programs for low-income children.<sup>2</sup>

Paying attention to the abovementioned, information bring us to the following conclusion:

- Investing in our children is a moral and ethical decision, which makes perfect sense for the wellbeing of our communities now and for the future.
- Investing in our children cannot be postponed or delayed.
- Lack of investing now is disinvesting in our children and the wellbeing of all.
- Investing in early childhood education has one of the highest long-term return on our investment. This investment will benefit everyone in the community who can enjoy a future with productive, healthy, and balanced people who were save from being marginalized and ostracized because of the economic status of their parents.

## **2) Structure of the Study:**

This proposal spells out various segments of this study from inception to the full development of the policy initiative for a Universal (Countywide) High Quality Early Childhood Education for Ventura County. Its various segments include the following:

- A thorough literature survey of the studies showing the importance of the early childhood education, why it is needed, and the review of best practices.
- Estimating the size of the children in various ages who are in need of early childhood education based on various income criteria within the county (we can do it based on zip codes).
- Review of economic and social return on investing in early childhood education.
- Estimating size of investment within the county, which are needed for establishing the needed industry.
- Assessing the potential for establishing the industry, review of various possible seniors of investment (tax generation, public/private partnership, role of VCCF and other nonprofit organization), and investigating the exiting or emerging possible shortcomings (industry

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<sup>2</sup> Masse, L. and Barnett, W.S., A Benefit Cost Analysis of the Abecedarian Early Childhood Intervention (2002); Karoly et al., Early Childhood Interventions: Proven Results, Future Promise (2005); Heckman et al., The Effect of the Perry Preschool Program on the Cognitive and Non-Cognitive Skills of its Participants (2009)

infrastructure, labor market, educational needs, etc.)

## **2.1) Literature Review of Relevant Studies**

In this segment of the study, we will conduct a thorough survey of the pertinent research and present the scientific traces of studies showing the cost of ignoring/undermining early childhood education based on the existing experiences within a national and international setting. Findings from this segment of the studies will enable us to find the latest information in the following areas of our focus:

- Cost of overlooking and ignoring high quality early childhood education in terms of inability of children to succeed and its consequence in terms of :
  - Need for remedial education later on.
  - Cost of children's likely academic failure in later years.
  - Possible healthcare cost later in life.
  - All other possible direct or indirect costs (yet to be developed based on the literature survey).
- Increased in educational attainment and higher productivity.

## **2.2) Assessing the Size of the Children Population in Various Ages Who Are in Need of Early Childhood Education Based on Various Income Criteria Within the County.**

High quality early childhood education is for all children regardless of the economic status of their parents. Some of our early studies for Ventura County show that cost of childcare (not even for a high quality early childhood education) is outside the economic possibility of an overwhelming majority of the residence of Ventura County. The level of cost of providing care for children for some income categories of families exceed their entire annual earnings. For most other groups of families the proportion is within the range that makes it impossible to bear. It is therefore important that any studies such as our proposed study bring out the relative economic circumstances of families at various level of income who have children in ages of 3 and 4 years (the age group that are targeted for receiving early childhood education before reaching kindergarten age) within different location (zip codes).

In this segment of our proposed study, we intend to estimate the number of children at 3 and 4 years of age across a number of selected categories of household (family) income. We also count the total number of children in each geographic location. We could add additional socio-economic content to the geographic location which may be of value in the other segments of this report which undertake other tasks of providing high quality early childhood education in those areas.

One of the distinct features of this study is its attention to bringing the kind of information and insight that can help us to create and put in place a functioning early childhood education. We should add that our data collection and analyses in this and other segments of this study follow the takeaways from our earlier literature survey.

### **2.3) Review of Economic Return on Investing in Early Childhood Education in Ventura County**

In this segment of the study we employ what were learned from the literature survey and apply some of the findings to measure some of the possible economic and social impact of high quality early childhood education in Ventura County. The economic impact will contain each of the below listed impacts separately as well as having them collectively in a manner to present the overall return on investment within a foreseeable timeline. We also capture other social and economic impacts, which may not be possible to estimate in monetary terms at this point of time as they may require additional well designed and accomplished longitudinal studies. The economic and social impacts are as follows:

- Return on investment due to increased productivity embodied in higher income.
- Return on investment due to improved health.
- Return on investment due to creation of better-paid jobs within the county through increased regional output, higher number of employment (direct, indirect, and induced), and tax revenue.
- Cost saving due to reduction in providing remedial education within the educational system.
- Return on investment in areas, which are hard to measure in monetary terms but can be captured and presented in qualitative terms through a collection of relevant studies.

### **2.4) Estimating Size of Investment within the County for Establishing the Needed Educational Services**

In this segment of the study we estimate what is needed in terms of investment to create the required capacity to serve the number of children who are in need of the universal high quality early childhood education within the county. This section may provide various scenarios based on supporting all children, which is the essence of a universal early childhood education or offer the service based on various levels of household/family income, or a blended system with reduced fee and free services. We will draw extensively on the existing models and compare their pros and cons in order to give support to creation of a system, which can be pragmatic and doable at this time.

This segment of the research will also bring forth a relevant discussion on what should be included in what may be called a full spectrum of early childhood education. We will draw from the existing experiences within the nation as well as the models/modalities, which have been developed and practiced in other countries.

This segment of the study is likely to generate several models of services to be provided and accordingly a series of various level of investments, which are needed to carry out the pertinent investments.

## **2.5) Assessing the Potential for Establishing the Industry: Review of Various Seniors of Investment & Investigating the Exiting or Emerging Possible Shortcomings**

Early childhood education can be financed through multiple means and methods. Ones again we will look at various existing models, compare, and contrast those models for presenting the type of models, which may suit our own county. We also bring what have been learned in the previous discussions/segments in order to present some relevant range of estimations depending on the type of model to be pursued. In general, the following models will be looked into and discussed in this segment of our research:

- Generating the needed investment through a countywide bond measure.
- Generating the needed level of investment through private-public partnership with support of philanthropic investment.
- Creating various hybrid models.

This segment of the study will also provide detailed roadmap for each of the proposed idea of investment schemes.

This segment of the research will also look into the existing possible bottlenecks, which may exist and can adversely affect the success of this project. These possible shortcomings may include efforts to resolve problems in the following areas:

- Physical structure in various locations.
- Needed qualified and specialized workforce.
- Transportation.
- Maintaining a uniform quality of care and educational offering in various locations within the county.
- Entertaining the possibility of offering services to children in a mixed setting of families regardless of their socio-economic status and the complications which such system may generate.

### **3) Estimated Expenses and Timeframe:**

As the author and principal researcher of this study I will engaged in the following series of activities:

- Extensive literature survey, study, and collection of the discussion that can shape our study and provide a rich content for various segments of this work.
- Design of a number of indicators and information points from various existing and highly reliable sources of information.
- Conduct of a number of estimations, running of various models of impact assessment, and analyses of the findings.
- Assisting and monitoring research assistants in their work.

- Writing and presenting the study to the management of VCCF and other audiences as needed.

I will also be using one or more experienced research assistants throughout this work.

It is hard to estimate how many hours of my work may be needed to accomplish all the tasks. A conservative estimates will be around 150 to 200 hours of work over a period of three months to produce the first draft and another 25 plus hours to present and modify the report and help structuring it in various summary forms. I will need at least some 100 hours of work of research assistants.

Assuming that we can begin our work as of mid-June, the report can be completed in three months.

**I am asking for a sum of \$30,000 for this study. This estimate is based on using an hourly pay for myself far below the rate that I use for grant preparation and other kind or research proposals.**