



Dispelling 9 Myths of Early Learning

Over the past 20 years, local advocates for young children have repeatedly made the case for why a state investment in early learning is a crucial move for Hawaii.

Their work has been diligent and methodical. They have consulted decades of research and collaborated with national experts from the Federal Reserve Board, Washington, D.C., advocacy groups, and other states that have already implemented early learning programs to prove that early learning is the best economic investment a state can make.

Our families have attested to the noticeable difference between a child who has attended preschool and another of their own who has not. Our DOE teachers have reported the same: children who haven't attended preschool are not ready for kindergarten. Hawaii business leaders who see the wisdom of paying it forward for workforce needs and more have contributed precious dollars to spread awareness of the importance of early learning through efforts such as the *Be My Voice!* Hawaii campaign.

The Myths and Their Realities

"The long-term costs are too high." Long-term costs for Hawaii will be higher without early learning – this is the State's chance to be proactive rather than reactive. Every \$1 invested today will generate \$4.20 in future savings and increased earnings for Hawaii. It will help raise social mobility for our keiki: it addresses growing economic inequalities and diminishing rates of upward mobility. Without it, research indicates that children will be more likely to drop out of school, become a teen parent, be arrested for a violent crime, and never attend college. By investing early, we are setting the foundation that will help strengthen our human capital and economy as well as provide dramatic life changing benefits for our children.

Let the proposed early learning program begin and track its effect on children – success will be evident and the Legislature can then determine potential future investment. We are confident the program will effect positive change; we will follow in the footsteps of success stories from other states and local programs that have tracked children.

"This is school vouchers and we don't want that." This is not school vouchers. The families who are eligible for assistance through our proposed program will only be able to enroll their children with providers that meet the requirements established by EOEL and are contracted by EOEL.

"We already spend enough money on early learning." Hardly true. The Preschool Open Doors program only serves about 300 children and has a budget of \$1.6 million. In comparison, there are 19,000 children born every year, with over 40% of them entering kindergarten without

having gone to preschool and starting school at a disadvantage. Our federally funded Head Start programs are at maximum enrollment. Kamehameha Schools educates some of our native Hawaiian children. However, many children remain unserved and a large percentage do not qualify for preschool assistance.

"I didn't go to preschool and I turned out fine." Like all things, times have changed and the body of research has grown, further supporting the need for preschool. A child entering kindergarten who does not have books at home and has not been exposed to letters or numbers is almost two years behind school expectations. We wonder why Hawaii lags behind other states in third grade reading scores; perhaps the 39 states with State-funded early learning programs have figured it out – you must start early!

"We should fix the K-12 system first." Early learning is a game changer for the K-12 system, as more children will enter kindergarten ready to learn on day 1. Without early learning experiences, children may enter a vicious cycle of playing catch-up, becoming discouraged, and lagging behind further. Getting children ready for school makes K-12 dollars go further; it reduces spending on remedial education, the need for special education, and truancy. Local and national efforts to reform K-12 that involve early learning have already borne fruit.

"Gains fade by third grade." Solid, long-term studies (e.g., Perry Preschool, Abecedarian, and Chicago Longitudinal studies) invalidate this claim. Students with early learning experience are catching up once they are exposed to formal schooling. Gains made through early learning must be sustained with efforts made in the K-12 system. Hawaii has created a learning continuum with consistent learning standards for early learning through third grade.

"Parents should take care of their own children." Parents want the best for their children. The reality, however, is that in Hawaii, over 65% of parents with young children are working. Their children are in child care arrangements that don't necessarily have the same standards of quality. Our proposed program will help ensure there is a consistent standard of quality that addresses learning and development and provide tools to support families as their child's first teacher.

"We should delay implementation until after the Constitutional amendment is ratified." If we don't have a program in place for Fall 2014, there will be no services for the 5,100 children in the gap group created by the change in kindergarten entry age, which is a result of legislative action in 2012.

"We should wait for new federal programs." To take advantage of federal monies from President Obama's and Senator Mazie Hirono's early learning initiatives, we must have a State program in place; their initiatives are being designed as state-federal cost-sharing models. Hawaii lost out on Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grant monies because we did not have an early learning program in place.