

# Investing in Parenting Education

## Parenting Education Matters

*Our entire nation's economic health and societal well-being are significantly enhanced when parents have the tools they need to help their kids start school prepared to learn, develop the social skills necessary to pay attention and work in teams, and grow up to be productive adults.*

—“Developmental and Economic Effects of Parenting Programs for Expectant Parents and Parents of Preschool-Age Children,” Partnership for America’s Economic Success, 2009

Research continues to show the fundamental importance of adult-child relationships in the earliest years of children’s lives, as well as the critical role that parents play in nurturing their children’s cognitive and social-emotional development. According to the recent report, “Developmental and Economic Effects of Parenting Programs” (cited above), “despite the potential for early childhood education to foster positive child development, family environments typically account for greater variance in children’s outcomes, reflecting the indisputable fact that parents remain their children’s first teachers, and what they do matters for children.” For example, differences in parenting practices account for up to 50 percent of the gaps in school readiness.<sup>i</sup>

Research also confirms that programs that help parents to build strong relationships with their children are among the most cost-effective investments in children’s future health and well-being. Economic analysis demonstrates that for every dollar invested in early childhood programs, savings of \$3.78 to \$17.07 can be expected.<sup>ii</sup> These savings occur as early interventions promote school retention; improve the quality of the workplace; help schools to be more productive; raise earnings; strengthen social attachments; and reduce crime, teenage pregnancy, and welfare dependency.

However, too many parents lack information about child development, have multiple stress factors in their lives that affect their parenting attitudes and practices, or have inadequate social support networks. Parenting education programs can teach parents to build strong, positive relationships with their children and to prepare them for school, in addition to reducing family stress, increasing parent confidence, and reducing isolation. Other outcomes associated with effective parent education programs include decreased rates of child abuse and neglect; increased parental knowledge of child development and parenting skills; improved parent-child communication; better physical, cognitive and emotional development in children; reduced substance abuse among youth; and improved parental monitoring and discipline.<sup>iii</sup>

## Oregon Lacks a Coordinated Statewide System of Programs for All Parents

Many excellent programs throughout the state provide support and education to parents. Strengths of Oregon’s system of parenting education include:

- A state-funded, statewide first-birth home visiting program (Healthy Start), as well as other home visiting models used in a few locations
- Fourteen community-based Relief Nurseries, which are considered to be a national model for intervention with highly stressed families
- Eugene-based Birth To Three’s role as a model program and developer of highly regarded best-practice parenting education curricula and facilitator training

- Parenting education expertise at OSU’s Extension Family and Community Development Program
- Increasing use of best-practice programs in communities around the state
- The development by the Oregon Parenting Education Collaborative (OPEC) of 11 Parenting Education Hubs serving 19 Oregon counties

Before the creation of the OPEC Hubs, there was little coordinated parenting education infrastructure in Oregon. This problem persists in the 17 Oregon counties not currently served by an OPEC Hub. Apart from Healthy Start, very little state funding is dedicated to parenting education. The system is fragmented and not clearly linked to other services for young children and their families; in most communities, parents have no centralized resource to help them find and choose programs. Consequently, parents often do not know how to find out what programs are available and appropriate for them. Also, parenting education is often perceived as a service for “bad” parents, rather than as a source of support and information from which every parent can benefit.

The Ford Family Foundation and The Oregon Community Foundation commissioned a report titled “A Snapshot of Parenting Education in Oregon” from Oregon State University, which found that although all 36 counties have parenting education programs, rural areas are underserved, too few organizations are using proven programs, and unstable funding undermines the availability and consistency of parenting education in rural and urban areas.

---

<sup>i</sup> Brooks-Gunn, J., and Markman, L.B. (2005). The contribution of parenting to ethnic and racial gaps in school readiness. *Future of Children*, 15 (1), 130–168.

<sup>ii</sup> Bowman, S., Pratt, C., Rennekamp, D., and Sektnan, M. (2010, June). Should we invest in parenting education? Retrieved from [http://www.oregoncf.org/Templates/media/files/early\\_childhood/should\\_we\\_invest\\_ped.pdf](http://www.oregoncf.org/Templates/media/files/early_childhood/should_we_invest_ped.pdf).

<sup>iii</sup> Samuelson, A. (2010, August). Best practices for parent education and support programs. Retrieved from [http://whatworks.uwex.edu/attachment/whatworks\\_10.pdf](http://whatworks.uwex.edu/attachment/whatworks_10.pdf).