



It Takes a Community to Build Good Schools

Why are early-childhood and broad based community initiatives important to changing the educational outcomes for our children and the well-being of community?

Early Childhood Education - Following are key research findings that come from a growing body of research that support the importance of initiatives from birth to 5 years that prepare young children for success in kindergarten and the years beyond:

- Learning opportunities before children enter school substantially predict their success or failure.
- Thirty to 40% of children enter kindergarten without the social and emotional skills and language experiences needed to be initially successful in school. This undermines their education achievement both in the short and long run.
- By first grade, only half as many children (percentage wise) that come from poor families are proficient in understanding words in context and engaging in basic mathematics as children from non-poor families. Poor means families living at or below the poverty level.
- Compared to 50 years ago, a much greater percentage of American children are being born into disadvantaged families where investments in children are smaller than advantaged families.
- These lower investments in early education or health care affect later school success.
- Research evidence is convincing that if interventions occur early enough, they can improve children's health, welfare and learning significantly.
- The earlier the intervention, the greater the social returns.

Education Reform and Restructuring - If we are to achieve the educational results we want for all children, it will require major changes in the way we educate and reach children in the early years and in the schools. Following are just a few of the relevant lessons about the role of the community in this process from one of the foremost researchers in the area of education reform, Michael Fullan:

- You cannot mandate what matters. The more complex the reform, the less you can force it.
- Both top down and bottom up strategies are necessary.
- Connection with the wider environment is critical, especially in the local community.

State government and the local school district, local administrators and the teachers in the schools, and the parents, other citizens, business leaders and a broad array of social service agencies must be involved in supporting the ideas and providing resources for the changes to be successful over the long-term.

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