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The Center for Social Policy's 20th anniversary banner celebrates community and quality of life for all. The original mural can be seen in Dudley Square, an area that has benefited from CSP's longtime partnership with its residents and community organizations.



CENTER FOR SOCIAL POLICY
JOHN W. McCORMACK
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF POLICY
AND GLOBAL STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS BOSTON

Center for Social Policy

*Reshaping
poverty policy*



UMass Boston's Center for Social Policy is the research and evaluation partner of choice for policy makers and philanthropists concerned with the structural causes of poverty.

We focus on improving the lives of those outside the circles of power. True to our vow "to build knowledge from the ground up," we believe that constituent engagement in research illuminates, in a language and

format that policy makers and practitioners can understand, the realities faced by families living in poverty.

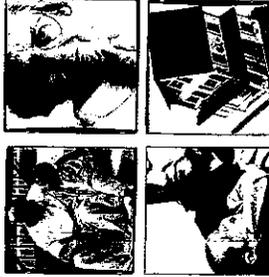
The Center for Social Policy creates avenues of understanding for social issues, building organizational capacity to improve planning, processes, and partnerships. Our findings provide both sound evidence of the dimensions of poverty and actionable solutions to the problem.

2008

Collaboration with Crittenton Women Fits & Starts: *The Difficult Path for Working Single Parents*, documents how existing inadvertently create hurdles to employment career advancement for low-income



2003
Groundbreaking study conducted for HUD, *Surviving Against the Odds*, illustrates how welfare, housing, and homelessness policies intersect in the lives of homeless families



2007

Bridging the Gaps: A Picture of How Work Supports Work in Ten States, a collaboration with the Center for Economic and Policy Research, demonstrates the importance of both earnings and public work supports for low-income working families

Convenes conference at JFK Library, "Looking Back and Looking Forward: Policy Visions from the New Deal," funded by Charles Stewart Mott Foundation

1997

In Harm's Way, the first study examining domestic violence among AFDC recipients in the context of the 1996 Massachusetts welfare reforms

1995

Pioneers the use of advanced technology to collect and generate data for homelessness planning and service delivery

1995-1996

Families at Risk Project offers recommendations on redesigning Massachusetts' family shelter system



2000

1998-2004

Provides technical assistance to homelessness service planners in eight states, which leads to data for HUD's Annual Homelessness Report to Congress



2005

2009

Partners with Boston Foundation to evaluate community development, housing, and family services in Boston's Fairmount Corridor

Immigrant Workers in the Health Care Industry examines needs and the importance of the pipeline

policy makers and practitioners and, the realities faced by living in poverty.

Our Social Policy creates avenues for addressing social issues, building our capacity to improve processes, and partnerships. Our work provides both sound evidence of the nature of poverty and actionable solutions to the problem.

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2011

Initiates "Merging Knowledge" dialogues with Fourth World Movement staff to facilitate mutual learning among poverty experts and those with lived experience

Publishes eight fact sheets on poverty in Massachusetts

Releases national report, *Finding the Right Fit: How Alternative Staffing Affects Worker Outcomes*, highlighting innovative methods for nontraditional job seekers



2010

Department of Elementary and Secondary Education changes adult basic education assessment practices and tools based on center recommendations on distance learning

The Massachusetts House and Senate pass foreclosure-protection legislation based on center-facilitated dialogues

2004

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Immigrant Workers in the Massachusetts Health Care Industry examines workforce needs and the importance of immigrants in the pipeline

2010



2012

Completes initial phase of Thrive in 5 evaluation on five Boston neighborhood coalitions' roles in preparing Boston's preschool children for sustained success

Provides research to inform EOS Foundation's anti-hunger initiative in Massachusetts

CAUTION





How Youth Are Put At Risk by Parents' Low-Wage Jobs

Co-authored by

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Boston College

and

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Center for Social Policy

University of Massachusetts Boston

This project was funded by the
Ford Foundation and the Annie
E. Casey Foundation.

It has been well documented that growing up poor is deeply harmful to children and youth. While some countries use social programs to reduce child poverty, US government policy has increasingly focused on employment of low-income parents as a key route to reduce the nation's high rate of family poverty. In particular, government programs have focused on jobs for single mothers whose children experience the worst economic hardships of all. Yet jobs as the solution to young people's poverty depend on the kind of work available to their parents. With the 30-year decline in higher-paying manufacturing jobs and, simultaneously, significant growth in low-wage service employment, many jobs do not provide the wages or flexibility that any parent needs to raise a family in safety and stability. *In fact, there is evidence that low-wage jobs can cause harm to young people's health, education, and overall development.*

Today, there are 16 million families headed by working parents in jobs that pay low wages. These workers are cashiers, nurses' aides, janitors, salespeople, food servers, and elder care attendants, and, along with other low-wage workers, they struggle to protect and care for their families. Further, low-wage work is projected to account for *two of every three new jobs in the United States over the next decade*. Beyond the low pay, many of these jobs are also considered "low quality," with few if any job benefits, unreliable schedules, and little flexibility that would allow parents to tend to their children's needs. Additionally, most of these jobs do not offer career ladders that might build family stability and result in future opportunity for children. The recent recession has put increased pressure on parents to keep or take this type of job, even though they sometimes create untenable conflicts with family needs.

Researchers only recently have started to examine poverty dynamics in working families, primarily focusing on the impacts of low-wage work on young children — clearly the most vulnerable of all. Yet without a doubt, adolescents also need resources, stability, and parental attention to support their wellbeing, do well in school, be safe, and move on to pursue healthy lives. In fact, today there is ample evidence that low-

income youth are facing disproportionate challenges to their overall wellbeing. They are seven times more likely to drop out of school than are higher income youth, are more likely to be among the one in five American teens who are obese, and are far more likely to become parents in their teen years. It is vital that we address the effect of parents' low-wage, low-quality work on the future of millions of the nation's young people.

In this report, we present a first-ever overview of what is known about the relationship between the status of youth and their parents' low-wage jobs. Of the 20 million adolescents with working parents, 3.6 million (one out of every six) are in low-income families where parents have low-wage jobs. We identify several ways that *young people are harmed by their parents' low-wage, low-quality jobs* that point to the urgency of this issue. This report examines the following key findings.

Parents' low-wage jobs:

- Many low-wage parents' earnings are so low they cannot cover the basics, and certainly cannot pay for after-school or other programs that protect and promote the development of children and adolescents.
- Low-wage jobs often have inflexible schedules that conflict with or disrupt family time. Parents are thus denied the critical time to monitor and encourage their children and adolescents.

Effects on young people:

- Youth in low-wage families are more likely to drop out of school.
- Low-income youth have a greater likelihood of experiencing health problems, including obesity, and they are more likely to bear children at a young age.
- Youth in hard-pressed low-wage families who have younger siblings are likely to grow up very fast and take on adult roles thus diverting time and attention from their schooling, extracurricular activities, and personal development.

Of the 20 million adolescents with working parents, 3.6 million — one out of every six — are in low-income families where parents have low-wage jobs.

We identify three core approaches to addressing the important link between youth development and parents' low-wage work. First, focusing on policy-makers and advocates, this report points out that parents' work and young people's lives are profoundly linked. Leaders in research, public policy, and advocacy for low-income workers and those who promote investment in youth development *should seek opportunities to collaborate*, and thus increase their effectiveness. Second, we identify specific, *current policy initiatives* that could improve outcomes for children and youth, including current efforts to promote parental job benefits and sick leave; efforts to allow more flexibility for all working parents; and efforts to increase hourly wages. In terms of youth policy, there is a critical need for programs and resources for low-income youth including after-school programs, summer programs, mentoring initiatives and other opportunities that ensure that young people get adult attention that supports their academic progress and health, and also protects them from growing up too fast. Finally, we point to specific groups of low-wage youth and families who face higher risks and who need focused attention and opportunities.

For decades, the U.S. policy solution to lowering family poverty has been to promote parental — particularly maternal — employment. Yet, as it stands, the fastest-growing jobs do not fulfill the promise of work as the way out of harmful poverty because they do not provide working parents with the pay or flexibility necessary to protect and promote the nation's millions of young people. ■

Full report available at

<http://www.umb.edu/csp/publications/reports/>



FRAC Facts: Direct Certification for Free School Meals

All children living in households receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)/Food Stamp benefits, Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) benefits, or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) cash assistance can bypass the standard application process and be "directly certified" for free school meals. With direct certification, families do not have to fill out a paper application to be processed by the school for determination of eligibility. Instead, agencies share information with schools, through data matching that must occur at least three times per year, to identify eligible children and automatically enroll them for free school meals. All school districts are required to directly certify children that receive SNAP/Food Stamp benefits.

While research shows that direct certification is an effective, efficient way to enroll eligible families in the school meals program, improvements in implementation are needed to connect more children to those meals. Current data show that direct certification is missing about 30 percent of the eligible children. Recommended state and local level efforts to improve direct certification systems are outlined below. Advocates who undertake these and other strategies can inform state policy makers about additional efforts and resources necessary to increase the number of eligible children included in the direct certification process.

BENEFITS OF DIRECT CERTIFICATION

- Reduces paperwork burden on families and schools by removing the need for a paper application.
- Increases the likelihood that eligible children receive school meals benefits – studies have shown that direct certification is effective in ensuring that more eligible children are enrolled for school meals.
- Removes families that are directly certified from further application verification procedures, which is beneficial because this can result in families losing their benefits due to communication barriers.
- Strengthens the school meals programs – studies have found direct certification to be a highly accurate enrollment method, so expanding direct certification can help build support for the programs.

BEST PRACTICES

- **Data matches are conducted at the state level with easy access by local school districts.** Creating electronic centralized matching systems is recommended to maximize the success of direct certification.
- **Data matches are updated at least monthly and school districts regularly check for newly eligible students.** A data match conducted only three times each school year misses children in families that move or start receiving food stamps during match intervals. Updating matches monthly can assure access for the very vulnerable families who experience temporary housing problems or other hardships during the school year.
- **Families are notified of their enrollment for free school meals for all children in the household.** When districts notify families that children have been automatically certified for free meals, they should alert them that the eligibility includes all children in the household and provide instructions for how to notify the district if additional children in the household were not automatically certified.
- **USDA's direct certification guidance is on-line:**
www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/governance/Policy-Memos/2011/SP13-2011_os.pdf
www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/governance/Policy-Memos/2010/SP_25_CACFP_11_SFSP_10-2010_os.pdf
www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/governance/Policy-Memos/2009/SP_38-2009_os.pdf
www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Governance/Policy-Memos/2008/SP_27-2008.pdf



FRAC Facts: Direct Certification for Free School Meals

ADVOCACY STRATEGIES

- **Assess the current system** by comparing the number of children directly certified to the number of children in households receiving food stamps. This information is collected by USDA and reported annually. The most recent report can be found at:
www.fns.usda.gov/ora/MENU/Published/CNP/FILES/DirectCert2010.pdf.
- **Facilitate a joint meeting with the State agencies that administer the SNAP/Food Stamp and school meals programs** to review current systems at the state and local levels. Having a third party, such as an advocate, request such a meeting can be helpful in pushing it higher on busy agendas. The agencies are required by federal statute to have a written agreement which establishes procedures for direct certification. A USDA memo detailing the contents of the agreement can be found at [www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Governance/Reauthorization Policy 04/Reauthorization 04/2005-04-19.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Governance/Reauthorization%20Policy%2004/Reauthorization%2004/2005-04-19.pdf). A review of the agreement is a good place to start for this meeting. Look at what systems are in place and what still needs development. Use this opportunity to review or obtain data from the different agencies and for developing a common understanding of the current situation and goals for system improvement. An annual or bi-annual meeting of this group could help monitor progress during the phase-in period for direct certification at all school districts.
- **Advocate for improved data matches and matching processes.**
 1. Update the data matching system to ensure that all children in SNAP households are directly certified:
 - a. Set up back-up systems at the school level to identify and directly certify additional children in the households of individually matched children; and
 - b. Ensure that the notice to parents informing them that a child has been directly certified includes directions if other children in the household have not yet been certified for free meals.
 2. Improve the data matching process by assessing and testing the match criteria. States can use a variety of criteria to match the SNAP/food stamp record with the school enrollment record (name, date of birth, TANF case number, etc). Limiting the criteria used may cause missed student matches. States should choose broad and multiple match criteria that captures all of the students eligible for free meals.
 3. Provide training and outreach to local education agencies as many of them may be unaware of the best ways to use the direct certification system.
- **Obtain funds from state or federal sources for improved data management systems.** Funding could be discussed in a state advisory committee meeting or an individual meeting with the state agencies. Funds may be available at the state level through a variety of sources. Generating outside stakeholder support to advocate for funding could make the difference in getting a state appropriation. On the federal level, USDA has grant funds available to help states improve their systems. For more information on the USDA grants, go to www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/grants.htm.

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FRAC Facts: Community Eligibility

Community Eligibility allows schools with high numbers of low-income children to serve free breakfast and lunch to all students without collecting school meal applications. This option increases participation by children in the school meal programs, while schools reduce labor costs and increase their federal revenues, allowing for a healthier student body and a healthier school meal budget.

How it Works

- Schools in high-poverty areas provide free breakfasts and lunches to all students without collecting applications or tracking eligibility in the cafeteria.
- A formula based on the number of students certified without the need for paper applications (called "Identified Students") is the basis for reimbursements instead of paper applications.
- Any school building can use this option when 40 percent or more students are certified for free meals without a paper application based on their status as in foster care, Head Start, homeless, migrant, or living in households that receive SNAP/Food Stamps, TANF cash assistance or FDPIR benefits.
- The reimbursement rate for both lunch and breakfast is determined by multiplying the percent of Identified Students by 1.6. The resulting number is the percent of meals reimbursed at the "free" reimbursement rate, with the rest being reimbursed at the "paid" rate. For example, a school with 50 percent Identified Students would be reimbursed at the free rate for 80 percent of the breakfasts and lunches it served ($50 \times 1.6 = 80$) and the remaining 20 percent would be reimbursed at the paid rate.
- Participating schools are guaranteed to receive the same reimbursement rate (or a higher one if the level of direct certification increases) for 4 years.
- Community eligibility has been available in Illinois, Kentucky and Michigan since the start of the 2011-2012 school year. Washington DC, Ohio, West Virginia and New York began offering the option in the 2012-2013 school year, with Florida, Georgia, Maryland and Massachusetts starting in the 2013-2014 school year. Beginning in the 2014-2015 school year, all schools nationwide that meet the 40 percent identified student threshold will be able to participate in this option.

Benefits

- All students receive all meals at no charge.
- Paperwork for schools and families is dramatically reduced. Families no longer have to complete applications, and schools no longer have to certify individual student eligibility which also eliminates the verification process.
- School meal service is streamlined. School meal staff no longer collect payments or do individual student counting and claiming. They simply count total meals served and assure that each student only receives one meal at the point of service.
- Universal (free) meals make it easier for schools to implement alternative meal service such as "grab and go" and breakfast in the classroom.

UNIVERSALLY AVAILABLE, PUBLICLY FUNDED EARLY EDUCATION

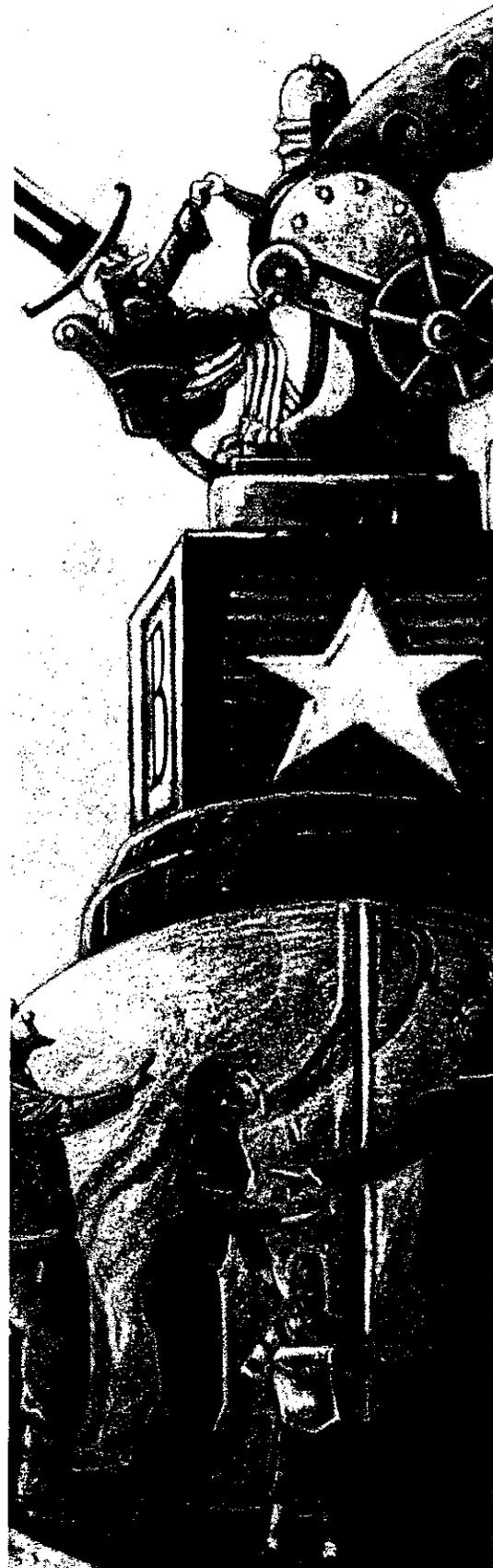
Arthur MacEwan

UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS, BOSTON

Universally available, publically funded early childhood education would be a benefit not only to children and their families, but to society.

The United States provides free public education for children from kindergarten through high school.¹ So why do we require that parents of younger children either pay for early education programs or apply for government programs targeted at the poor?

The gains from early childhood education programs are well established: the best studies suggest that they have substantial economic returns to both the children and society.² The benefits that can be traced to high-quality early education show up in the higher salaries that children earn as grown-ups, the greater contribution to society that their salaries reflect, and the higher tax receipts garnered. Elevated high school graduation rates and college-going



rates are also correlated with early education, as well better health outcomes, fewer incidences of repeating a grade or needing special education, reduced reliance on social support programs, and less engagement with the criminal justice system.

The foundations of such benefits are summed up in a 2000 volume published by the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine: “From birth to age 5, children rapidly develop foundational capabilities on which subsequent development builds. In addition to their remarkable linguistic and cognitive gains, they exhibit dramatic progress in their emotional, social, regulatory, and moral capacities. All of these critical dimensions of early development are intertwined, and each requires focused attention.”³

Despite the research, neither the federal government nor the states have allotted sufficient funding to allow a significant expansion of such programs. Whenever it is promoted, it is almost always targeted at children from low-income families. The logic of targeted programs is, first, that resources are scarce, and second, that the payoff of early childhood education is largest for children from low-income families. It seems to follow that available funds should go where they would get the highest return—not to mention that the approach seems likely to make the greatest contribution to equal opportunity.⁴

The targeting argument is built, however, upon the assumption that government funds for social programs are inherently limited. Costs and benefits are not weighed.

Children and Families

Ideally, budget decisions would be based on a clear understanding of the costs and benefits of each program vying for the funds. The total amount of funding—federal and state—for child care would thus remain an open question, and decisions about targeted versus universal programs would be based on an assessment of the gains from and problems of each option.

The Gains to the Children

Although there is substantial evidence that children from low-income families gain the most, there is also substantial evidence that the gains for children from low-income families are greater in programs that are diverse in terms of the income levels of the children’s families than in programs targeted just at children from low-income families.

A 2007 study compared two groups of children from low-income families, one entering economically diverse preschools and the other entering preschools for low-income families. The study found

significantly greater improvement in the language scores of the former group. In fact, for the children in the diverse preschools, test scores over the year were not significantly different from those of the more affluent children in the programs. A 2007 Georgia study found that the ability level of the peers in a child’s classroom has direct and positive effects on the child’s cognitive skills, prereading skills, and expressive language skills. And a 2009 study, involving almost 2,000 children in 11 states, found similar positive effects of peers on language skills. (Further study is needed to ascertain what happens to the skills of higher-income children in the economically integrated programs.)⁵

Gains for children from low-income families are greater in programs that are diverse in terms of the income levels of the children’s families.

The Burdens on Families

Targeting publicly funded early childhood education at low-income families is based on assumptions about a neat divide between families who can and families who cannot afford to pay. Yet the costs are a severe, perhaps prohibitive, burden on many families who are not classified as low-income.

In New England, at the median income of single-mother families, the cost for a four-year-old in a center ranges from 33.2 percent of income (New Hampshire) to 44.8 percent (Massachusetts)—more than the typical cost of housing. Many single-mother families would be eligible for some form of support through existing targeted programs, but those at the median-income level would not. Even for two-member families (a mother and one child) with incomes twice the poverty level, the cost of center care in New England ranges from 26.9 percent of income (Maine) to 39.7 percent (Massachusetts). Similarly, for three-person families (two parents and a child) with incomes at twice the poverty level, costs range from 21.3 percent of income (Maine) to 31.5 percent (Massachusetts).

Even for families with the state median household income, the cost as a share of income ranges from 14.8 percent to 17.7 percent. For families with an infant or more than one child of pre-K age, the percentage cost is higher.⁶

The Perverse Impact of Targeted Programs

Targeted, or means-tested, social programs have perverse impacts that do not encumber public K–12 programs. Targeted programs create a disincentive for families to earn more. For families receiving support from targeted social welfare programs (child care, housing, and the like), efforts to earn more are likely to be self-defeating since income gains would be offset by loss of eligibility for support programs. A 2008 Boston study illustrates the problem. A single mother with two children, ages 8 and 3, who could obtain training and move from an \$11-an-hour job to a \$16-an-hour job would gain \$833 per month in wages but would suffer a \$863 loss in monthly supports.⁷

A second perverse impact is that moderate-income families also find child-care expenses burdensome. No matter where the cutoff point is, those above the cutoff point—especially those close to the cutoff point—would feel that they were being treated unfairly. The problem becomes especially acute when the division is, or is perceived as being, along racial lines.

In addition, experience with K–12 schooling has demonstrated that separation of programs by income levels generally yields poor schooling for children from low-income families. If schooling—at any level—is to contribute to economic and social equality, the schooling itself needs to be equal in quality. Universal programs do not guarantee economic integration, as we know from K–12 experience, but they can make a difference.

§

Half of the three- and four-year-olds nationwide (and many younger children) are already enrolled in day-care programs, and more would be but for parents' financial constraints. Greater public funding for early childhood education targeted at children from low-income families would be a step forward, but not a big step forward.

After all, we fund K–12 schools through our taxes. We don't fund the K–12 schools simply for kids from low-income families. We don't have a sliding scale. We treat everyone the same. A "common school," with all its warts, has been one of the great social and economic accomplishments of our society. We should recognize that and provide the same for education in the formative years of cognitive and social development.

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Endnotes

¹ This article draws on Arthur MacEwan, "Early Childhood Education as an Essential Component of Economic Development, with Reference to the New England States" (white paper, Political Economy Research Institute, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, January 2013), http://www.peri.umass.edu/fileadmin/pdf/published_study/ECE_MacEwan_PERI_Dec24.pdf.

² See James J. Heckman et al., "The Rate of Return to the High-Scope Perry

Preschool Program," *Journal of Public Economics* 94 (2010); and Janet Currie, "Early Childhood Education Programs," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 15, no. 2 (spring 2001).

³ Committee on Integrating the Science of Early Childhood Development, *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*, Jack P. Shonkoff and Deborah A. Phillips, eds. (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 2000), 5.

⁴ See Art Rolnick and Rob Grunewald, "The Economic Case for Targeted Preschool Programs," in *The Pre-K Debates: Current Controversies and Issues*, Edward Zigler et al., eds. (Baltimore and Washington: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co. and the National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2011).

⁵ Carlota Schechter and Beth Bye, "Preliminary Evidence for the Impact of Mixed-Income Preschools on Low-Income Children's Language Growth," *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 22 (2007); Gary T. Henry and Dana K. Rickman, "Do Peers Influence Children's Skill Development in Preschool?" *Economics of Education Review* 26 (2007); and Andrew J. Mashburn et al., "Peer Effects on Children's Language Achievement During Pre-Kindergarten," *Child Development* 80, no. 3 (May–June 2009). See also Steven Barnett, "Four Reasons the United States Should Offer Every Child a Preschool Education," in Zigler et al.

⁶ See MacEwan, table 3, http://www.peri.umass.edu/fileadmin/pdf/published_study/ECE_MacEwan_PERI_Dec24.pdf.

⁷ R. Loya et al., *Fits & Starts: The Difficult Path for Working Single Parents* (report, Crittenton Women's Union and the Center for Social Policy, McCormack Graduate School, University of Massachusetts, 2008), [Scholarworks.umb.edu/csp_pubs/10/](http://scholarworks.umb.edu/csp_pubs/10/).

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