

NATIONAL FORUM ON EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM EVALUATION

What Research Tells Us About Program Effectiveness in the First Five Years

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NATIONAL SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL ON THE DEVELOPING CHILD
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Effective Services Improve Relationships and Environments

Positive relationships and emotional, social, cognitive, and language learning experiences can be promoted both at home and through a range of **evidence-based** parent education, family support, early care and education, and intervention services.

Program Evaluation Research Helps Identify Effectiveness Factors

Not all programs are effective.

Effectiveness factors are key to distinguishing those programs that work from those that do not.

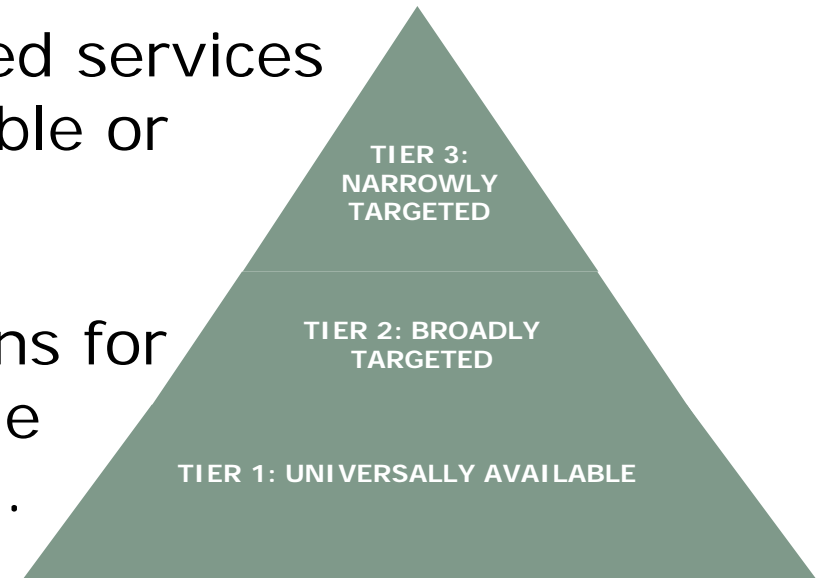
Our goal: to provide clearer guidance than the usual calls for “quality.”

Science Points Toward a 3-Tiered Approach to Ensure Healthy Development

3: Narrowly targeted, specialized services for children experiencing tolerable or toxic stress.

2: Broadly targeted interventions for children in poverty (e.g., income supports and early enrichment).

1: Basic health services and early care and education available to all children to help build and sustain strong brains and bodies.

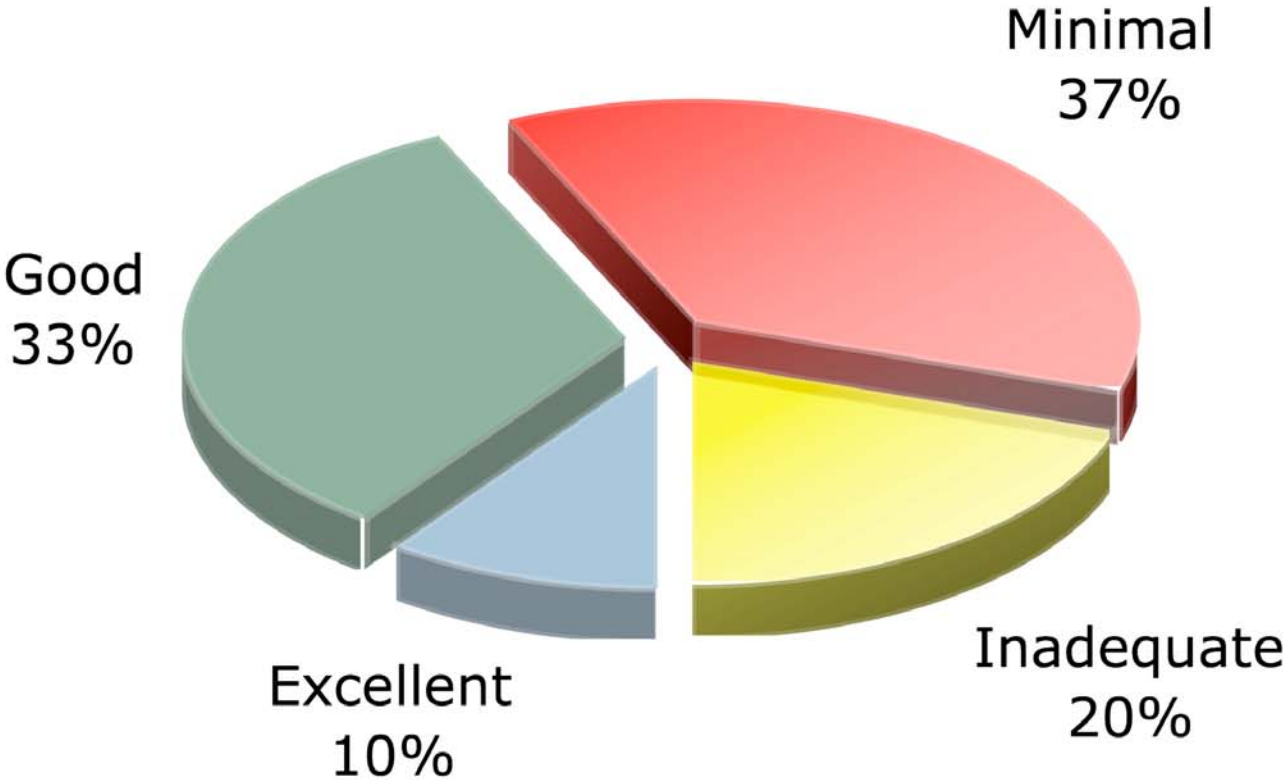


Tier 1: Basic health services and early care and education

Access to basic medical care for pregnant women and their children can help prevent threats to healthy development and provide early diagnosis and appropriate intervention when problems emerge.

Access to safe, stable care environments in the first years of life provides crucial developmental support to children in all families that need child care.

Child Care & Early Education Quality: Uneven at Best



Source: Rigby, Ryan & Brooks-Gunn (2006)

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Preschool education with proven **effectiveness factors** has positive effects on the early school success of young children.

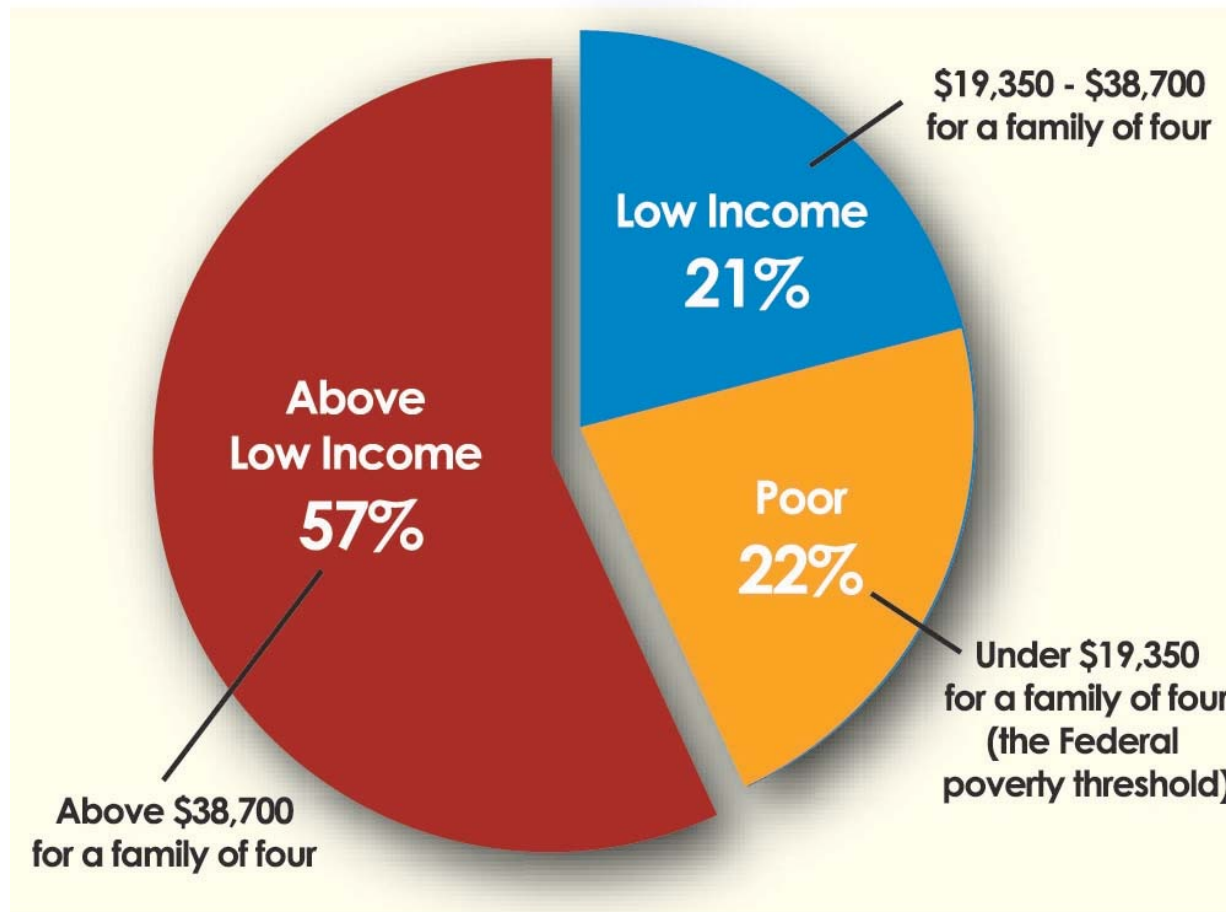
Effectiveness Factors for Early Care and Education Programs for Children From Birth to Age 5

- Qualified and well-compensated personnel
- Small group sizes and high adult-child ratios
- Language-rich environment
- Developmentally appropriate “curriculum”
- Safe physical setting
- Warm and responsive adult-child interactions

Tier 2:
**Broadly targeted interventions
for children in poverty**

Children in Poverty: Pay Now or Pay Later

Percent of U.S. Families with Toddlers and Infants



Source: National Center for Children in Poverty (2006)

Poverty Affects Children Unequally

Child poverty rates compared to white children:

- x 4 for Native American children

- x 3 for Black children

- x 2.5 for Latino children

Rates of families experiencing food insecurity, overcrowded housing, lack of needed medical care:

- x 2 for Black and Latino families with children

- x 3 for Latino families headed by non-citizen

Tier 2: Broadly targeted interventions for children in poverty— Early enrichment

Programs that combine effective center-based care and education for children with support services for parents can have positive effects on both children and parents.

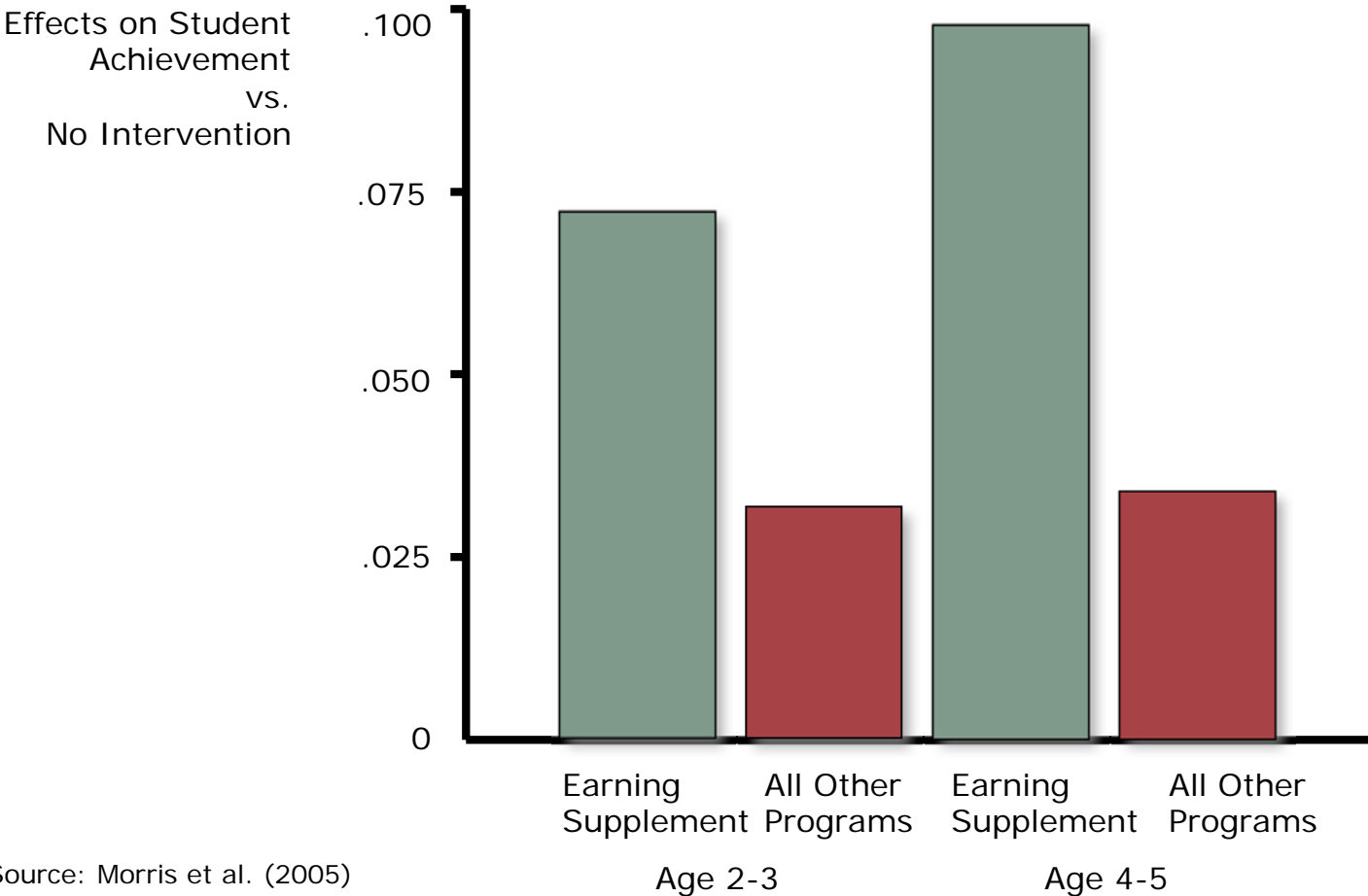
The right mix of services, mode of delivery (group vs. individual), and setting (center vs. home) may differ by community.

Tier 2: Broadly targeted interventions for children in poverty– Income supports

For low-income families, work-based income supplements have been demonstrated to boost the early school achievement of young children.

Policy options include expanded income tax credits for low-income families and welfare reform policies that “make work pay” by providing more income as parents make transitions from welfare to work.

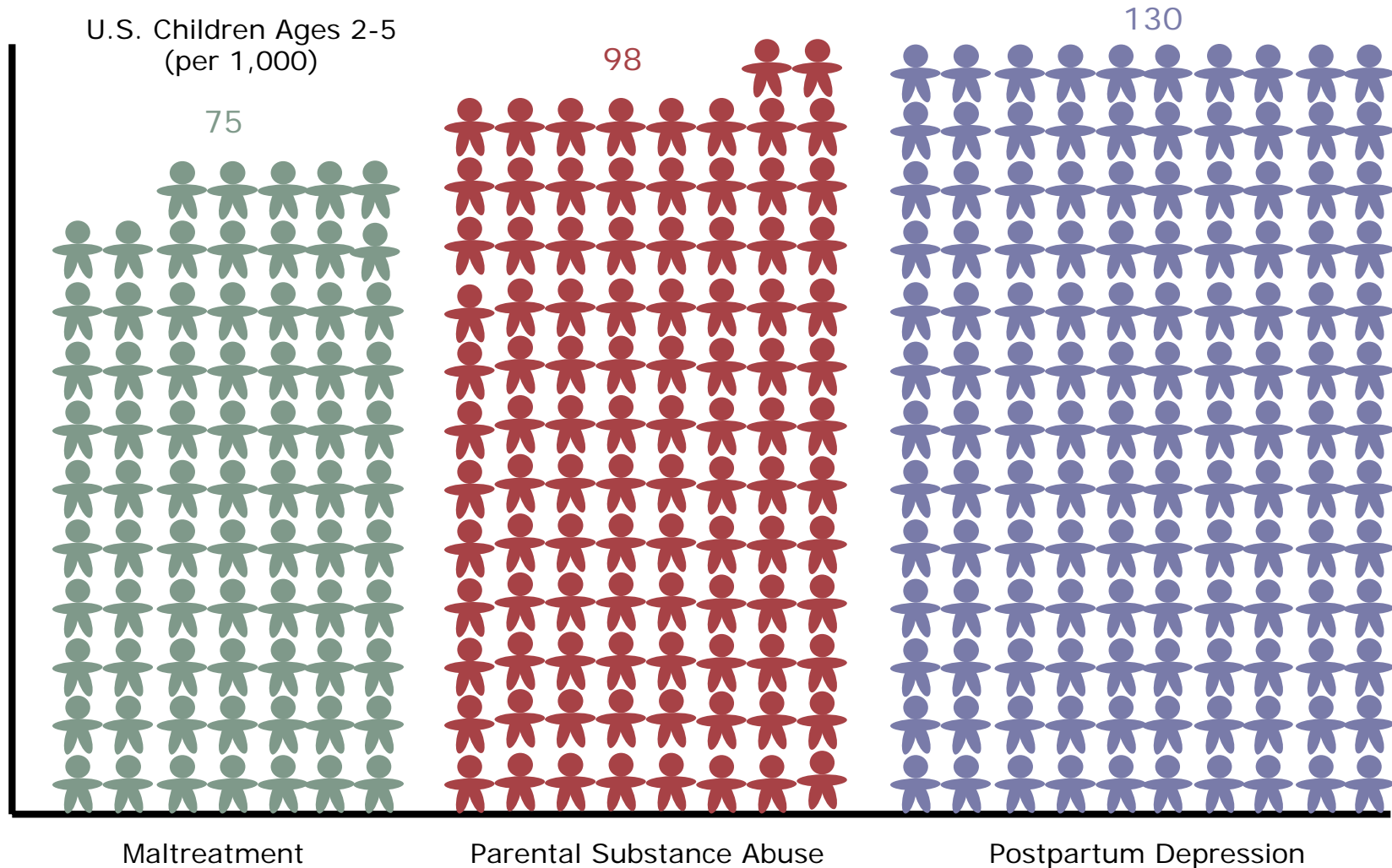
Making Work Pay Pays off in Student Achievement



Source: Morris et al. (2005)

**Tier 3: Targeted services for
children experiencing tolerable or
toxic stress**

Sources of Toxic Stress in Young Children



Source: Finkelhor et al. (2005)

Source: SAMHSA (2002)

Source: O-Hara & Swain (1996)

Tier 3: Targeted services for children experiencing tolerable or toxic stress

For vulnerable parents expecting a first child, early, intensive support by a skilled home visitor can produce significant benefits.

Effectiveness factors for home visiting include:

- More highly trained visitors = larger effects.
- No evidence that 1-3 visits have any impact.
- Engaging and maintaining participation of families is a key challenge.
- Some successful programs specifically target populations at high risk with focused curricula.

Tier 3: Targeted services for children experiencing tolerable or toxic stress

For parents facing sources of toxic stress (mental health problems, depression, substance use, domestic violence), successful programs have specific content and curricula addressing the source of stress.

Example: Family Connections project addressing maternal depression in Head Start.

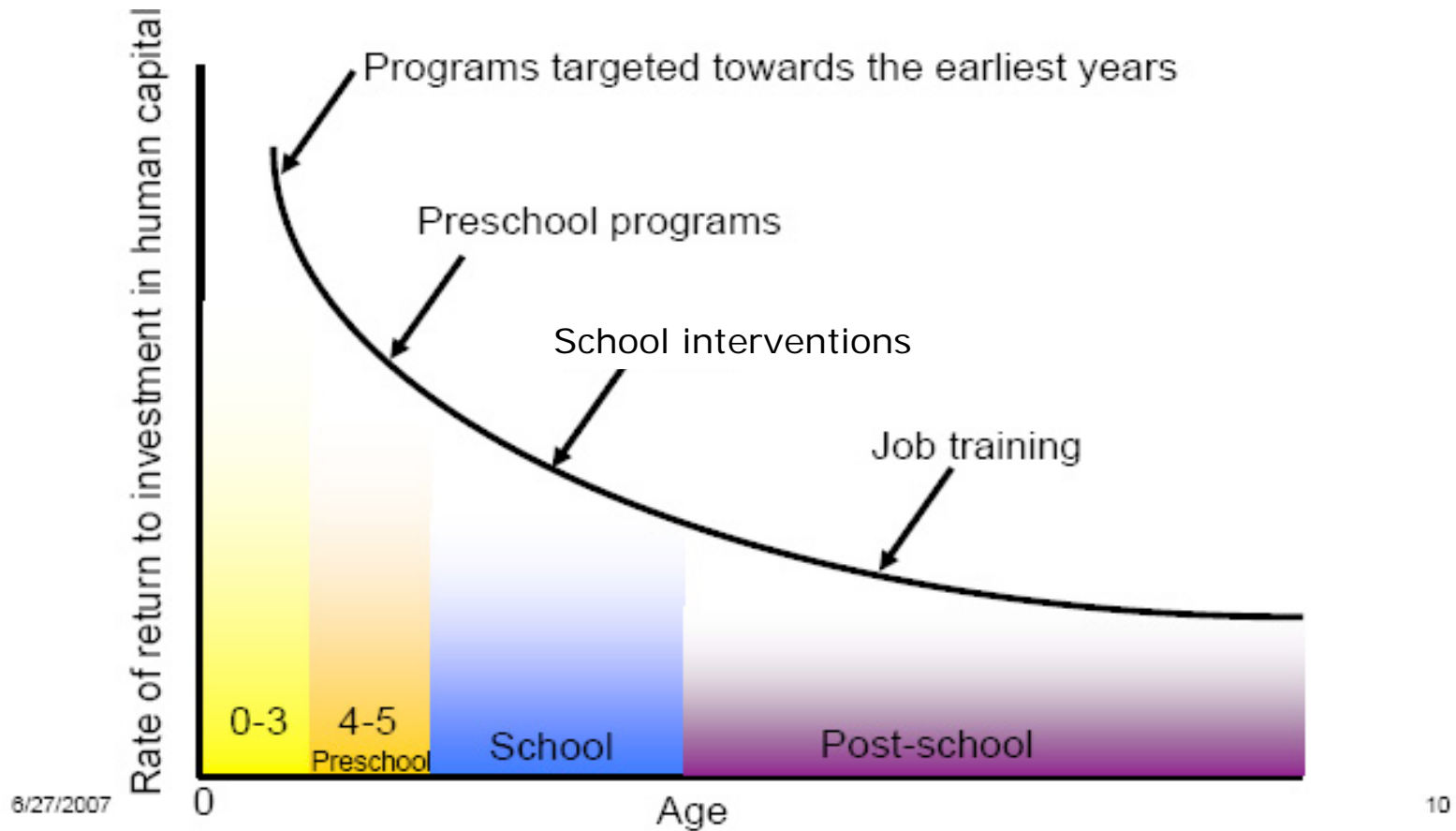
BUT few programs have been tested.

Which Services? Compare Costs to Benefits

Low cost services that have little impact are a waste of money. Responsible investments focus on effective programs that are staffed appropriately, implemented well, and improved continuously.

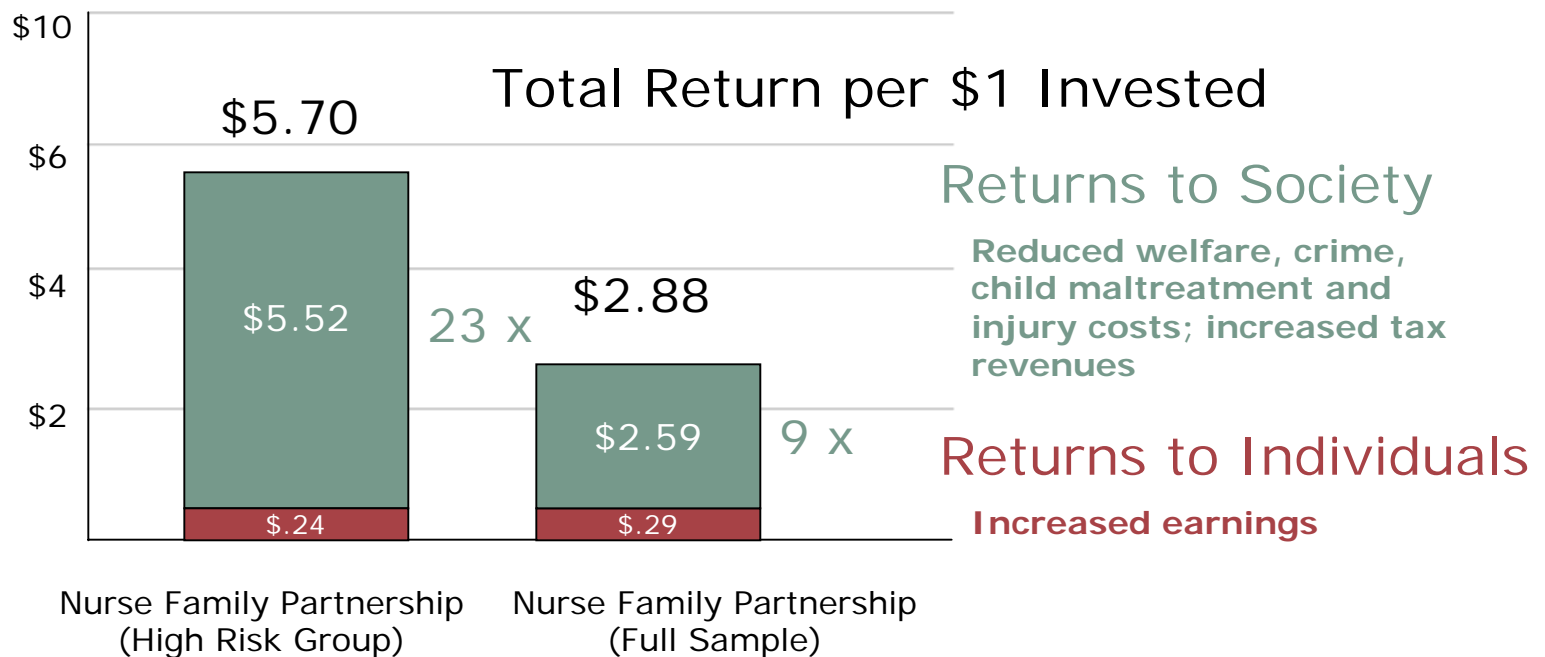
“Scaling up” effective programs continues to be a challenge. Our knowledge base regarding what works in quality improvement of early childhood care, education, and family support systems is in its infancy.

Rates of Return to Additional Investments in Human Capital for Disadvantaged Children

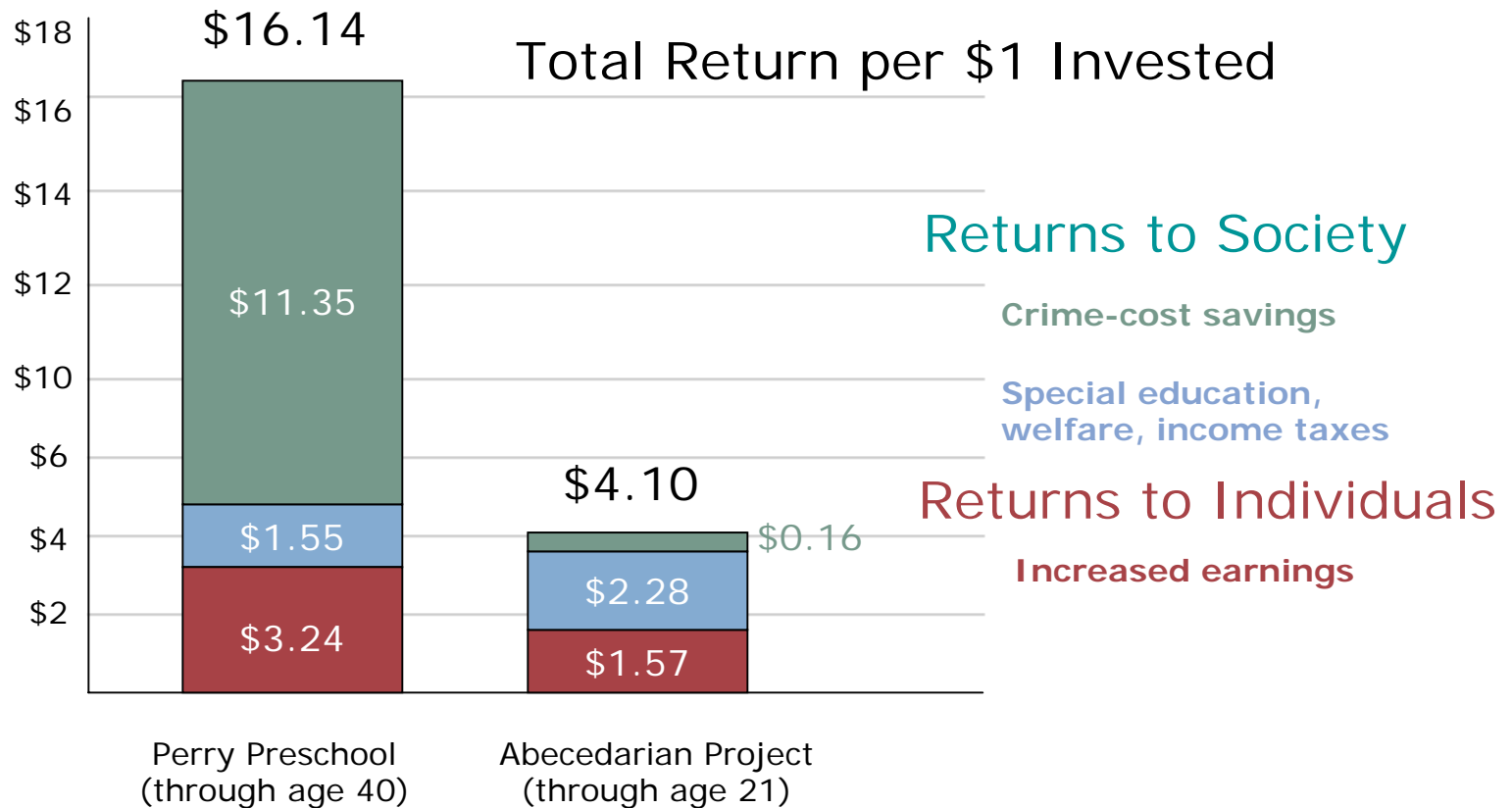


Heckman, J. "Investing in Disadvantaged Young Children Is Good Economics and Good Public Policy," Testimony before the Joint Economic Committee, Washington D.C., June 27, 2007

Cost/Benefit for Nurse Family Partnership (Dollars returned for each dollar invested)



Cost/Benefit for Two Early Childhood Programs (Dollars returned for each dollar invested)



The Childhood Continuum



Future Directions

Increase the quality of services across agencies to address multiple risk factors:

- income/workforce/asset development,
- early childhood care and education (ECCE), and
- preventive health and mental health interventions.

Invest in the development and retention of a skilled early childhood workforce.

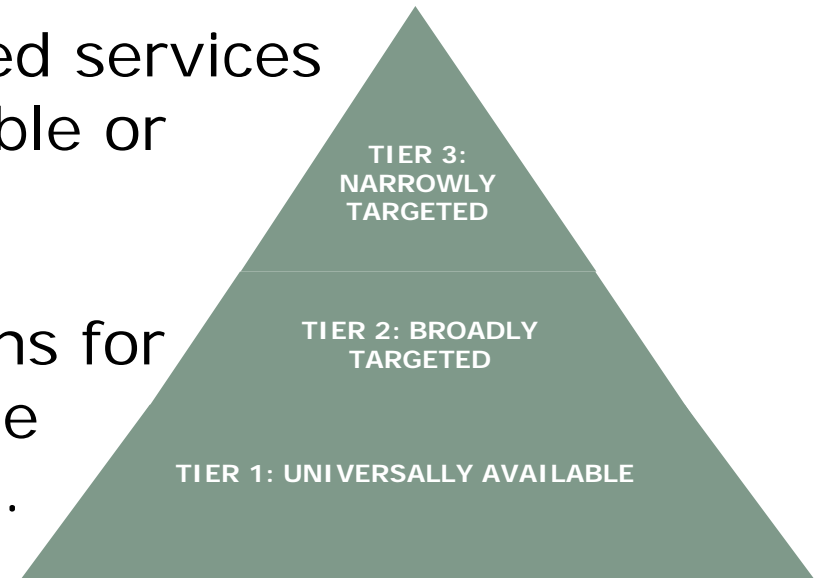
Improve programs for understudied and socially marginalized populations.

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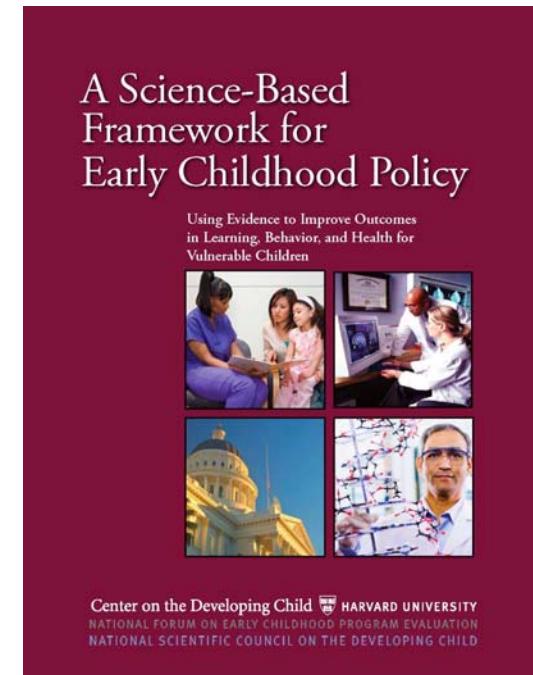
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