

United Way of Salt Lake
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United Way of Salt Lake Priority Area and Capacity Assessment

Education Best Practices: How to build a strong foundation of early learning from birth to age eight

Research Conducted for United Way of Salt Lake by Utah Foundation



Best-Practice Strategies

1. Low teacher-child ratios

- Large class sizes are a systemic barrier to high achievement in K-12
- Significant effects found when classes reduced to 15-20 students
- For younger children, adult-child ratio of 1:10 is recommended
- Positive effects increase as class sizes get even smaller

Best-Practice Strategies

2. Quality, age-appropriate, intentional instruction

- Focus on:
 - Early literacy
 - Numeracy
 - Social-emotional, physical, and cognitive growth
- Elements:
 - Age-appropriate, stimulating materials
 - Language-rich environment
 - Warm, responsive staff-child interactions
 - High, consistent level of child participation
 - Tailored to the children, families, community involved

Best-Practice Strategies

3. Parental involvement

- Get parents involved early
- Give parents active roles and responsibilities in governance and policy
- Recognize, respect, and address cultural and class differences
- Build trusting relationships with parents, families and children
- Increase awareness of importance of early education through social marketing and neighborhood connections

Best-Practice Strategies

4. **Comprehensive programs for children and families, including health, nutrition, and parent workforce supports**

- Health and nutrition, including prenatal
- Mental health services
- Parent workforce supports, including tax credits, wage supplements, etc.
- Provide a mix of center- and home-based services
- Link other service providers to families through schools
- Locally, Community Learning Centers are an example of this
- Help Me Grow program in Utah County also works to connect families to services through central coordinating

Best-Practice Strategies

5. Home visitations

- Especially useful from birth to age three
- Especially for first-time parents
- Link parents to community services
- Teach parents about developmental stages
- Teach parents about educational play with their children
- Best when combined with quality preschool
- Good example is Nurse Family Partnership, but it's expensive
- UW of Utah County has low-cost Welcome Baby Program, using volunteers

Best-Practice Strategies

6. Year-round access

- Best programs do not break for the summer
- After school programs help also

Best-Practice Strategies

7. Trained/certified teachers in early childhood development

- Presence of a teacher with at least a bachelor's degree correlated with higher success
- Additional specialized training in early education
- Funding is a hurdle, with salaries important for retaining these well-trained teachers

Best-Practice Strategies

8. Professional development

- Strong, relevant in-service training
- Time and resources to reflect on what students are learning and ways to improve
- Training responsive to local community characteristics and needs
- Interaction/mentoring with other teachers
- Link training over time, with opportunities for ongoing conversation and coaching

Best-Practice Strategies

9. Assessment and evaluation

- Establish measurable standards
- Collect and evaluate outcome data
- Measure academic, social, emotional, language, physical development
- Routine, continuous quality improvement
- Track individual children from birth through third grade (and potentially beyond)
- Should assess individual development and also program accomplishments

Best-Practice Strategies

10. Affordability

- Families with incomes <\$60,000 have least access to preschool
- Most acute for \$20,000-\$40,000 because lower income families receive assistance, such as Head Start eligibility
- Affordability is one of the biggest barriers to participation
- Significant advantages exist for children of well-to-do families: those with incomes >\$100,000 have 90% preschool enrollment rates for 4-year olds

Best-Practice Strategies

11. Public/private partnerships

- Private donors can improve quality and availability of programs by:
 - Providing flexible funding for local needs
 - Building coordinating capacity across a state
 - Increasing public awareness of importance of early education
 - Promoting best practices and expanding promising models
 - Providing funds that qualify for federal matches
- Private centers can provide needed capacity, ability to integrate with workplaces
- Public partners can improve quality of private centers through technical assistance, resources, and standards

Best-Practice Strategies

12. Birth to eight initiatives

- Early start is vital in brain development
- Income disparities are correlated with cognitive development disparities
 - These disparities show up at nine months old
 - By kindergarten, low-income kids are 12-24 months below national norms in language and pre-reading skills
- Aligning programs through age eight helps children retain learning and increases parental involvement and understanding of educational processes

Best-Practice Strategies

13. Address vulnerable populations

- Focusing on most disadvantaged provides more measurable and long-lasting effects
- Important elements:
 - Creating opportunities for children and parents to enrich language and literacy
 - Broadening roles of caregivers and service systems to provide developmental support to young children
 - Reducing the distance between cultures of those serving a neighborhood and the residents
 - Giving parents and residents a voice in designing systems
- Works best if connected and integrated through a family support center addressing multiple needs (like CLCs)

Best-Practice Strategies

14. Public awareness

- Two great barriers to early learning opportunities:
 - Lack of awareness of programs
 - Traditions discouraging educating young children
- Some prominent successes elsewhere using business partners and social marketing to influence public awareness
- Utah culture presents some challenges
 - Social value of stay-at-home parent causes distrust of some programs
 - Policymakers often not exposed to economic and cultural diversity (and corresponding needs) of younger Utahns
 - Lack of K-12 resources makes it difficult to channel funds to pre-K programs

Family Relationship Model

- Couple center-based care with support for low-income families, including health, work supports, and other social services
- Allows broad focus on environment that influences young children's development
- Environmental change is critical to support and maintain individual change
- Influence as many leverage points as possible to improve environment for children

Examples of Comprehensive Programs

- Chicago Child-Parent Centers
 - High quality preschool for 3-4 year olds, full-day kindergarten, with home visits, referrals to social services, parent involvement in schools
- High/Scope Perry Preschool Program
 - Well-known, long-term study showing positive personal and social effects of an intensive preschool program in the 1960s
- Educare Centers (Chicago)
 - Intensive, full-day, year-round program from birth to 5 years with small classes, highly qualified teachers, family support services. Effective, yet expensive (\$13,000+ per year per child)

Local High-Quality Preschool Example

- Granite School District Title I Preschool Program
- 3,000 students at 43 schools
- Uses federal Title I and special education funds, sliding scale tuition, grants, donations
- Center of Excellence designation by U.S. Dept. of Ed.
- Half-day preschool focused on early literacy, numeracy, social-emotional, physical, cognitive growth
- Low child-adult ratio, strong assessment, well-rounded staffing
- Shown to reduce school readiness gaps for disadvantaged children