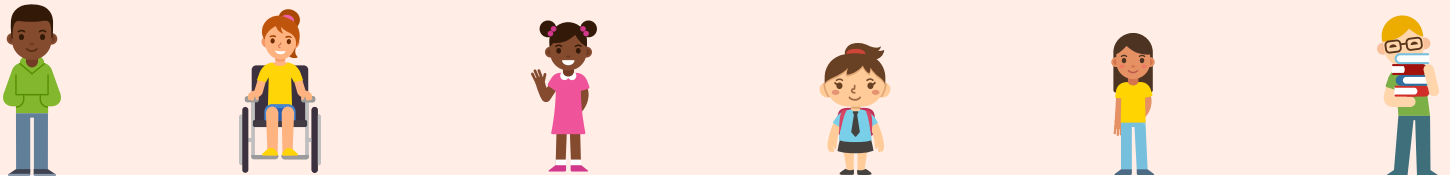


# road to the early achievement and development of youth



## Why Invest in Early Childhood Development?

State and local governments view improving the economy, strengthening the middle class and ensuring equitable opportunities for all as top priorities. Solving these challenges starts with investing in Sonoma County's greatest resource as early as possible: its people. The Road to the Early Achievement and Development of Youth (READY) Initiative has been collecting school readiness data (how "ready" a child is to enter kindergarten and start learning) for the last 6 years. Research shows that kids who do well early on in school are more likely to graduate from high school, attend college, earn a higher income and are less likely to be incarcerated. If we can identify students early on that lacked developmental opportunities to become ready to enter kindergarten compared to their peers, then we can increase that students' chances of succeeding in school and in life. Supportive opportunities for development, such as early interventions and quality early care and education (ECE), have been shown to build the skills that enable children to enter kindergarten ready to learn. A lack of these supports creates Opportunity Gaps, disparities in access to resources needed for children to be successful in school.

Closing Opportunity Gaps will help close Achievement Gaps that separate our Black, Indigenous and students of color (BIPOC) and disadvantaged students from their advantaged peers. Development opportunities can be inaccessible to families for reasons such as: lack of income to pay for ECE; lack of time to engage children in early learning; culturally inaccessible resources; geographic isolation; and lack of broadband internet access. Many of these barriers are a result of institutionalized racism, or different access to the goods, services, and opportunities of society by race. Institutionalized racism can be seen in material conditions and in access to power, including but not limited to: inequitable access to quality education, sound housing, gainful employment, appropriate medical facilities, and a clean environment.

We can't change the past, but we can invest in the future. By supporting our youngest community members to be successful in school, we are providing opportunities and resources for all, not just those that can afford it. Quality early learning and development programs, especially for BIPOC and disadvantaged children, can foster valuable skills, strengthen our workforce, grow our economy and reduce social spending. Here's how:



### Prevent the Achievement Gap

Gaps in knowledge and skills between disadvantaged kids and their more advantaged peers open up long before kindergarten, tend to persist throughout life, and are difficult and expensive to close. **In Sonoma County, only 2 out of 5 incoming students are observed as "ready" to start kindergarten with the necessary skills to be successful.** READY found that 64% of Sonoma County children participated in early learning from 2016-19 such as preschool or transitional kindergarten. **Children who attended an early learning program were two times more likely to enter school "ready".\***



### Improve Health

Recent research by child development expert, Dr. James Heckman, has shown dramatic **long-term health effects of early interventions for disadvantaged children** that incorporate early education, nutrition and health. More than 30 years later, treatment group individuals were at significantly **lower risk for serious cardiovascular and metabolic diseases**, such as stroke and diabetes. These findings demonstrate the great potential of coordinated birth-to-age-five early childhood programs to prevent chronic disease, reduce healthcare costs and produce a flourishing society (Heckman, et. al., 2014) Locally, kids that were able to have at least **one hour a day of outdoor play time were 2 times more likely to enter school "ready"** to start kindergarten.



### Increase Income

Another recent study published by top global researchers and Dr. Heckman, found that extremely disadvantaged children in Jamaica who took part in an early intervention similar to home visiting programs in the United States **boosted their earnings in adulthood by 25%**, putting their income on par with those of their more advantaged peers (Gertler, Heckman, 2014). Locally, READY has found that children whose annual family **income is \$100,000 or more are over 2 times more likely to enter Kindergarten "ready"** when compared to children whose annual family income is \$34,999 or less.



### Recovery from Dual-Pandemics & Disasters

Natural disasters, the COVID-19 pandemic and the long standing pandemic of institutionalized racism and white supremacy all have had traumatic impacts on our community. Students will start school with a high level of need and supports for emergent academic, health, and psychological issues. Providing quality education and early learning opportunities are critical now more than ever to support our community in recovery and bridging gaps between those with and without resources. Racial trauma shows up when looking at the difference between White and Latinx students school readiness levels. **White students are twice as likely to be "ready" for kindergarten compared to their Latinx peers.** Inequities also show up in the READY analysis of 2016-2019 participating families' annual income. Our data revealed that **48% of White families earn \$100,000 or more while 11% of Latinx families earn the same.**



### It makes Dollars and Sense

The **rate of return for investments in quality early childhood development for disadvantaged children is 7-10% per year** through better outcomes in education, health, sociability, economic productivity and reduced crime. Taking a proactive approach to cognitive and social skill development through investments in quality early childhood programs is more effective and economically efficient than trying to close the gap later on. There's an increased recognition of the value of investing in quality early childhood programs. **It's time to act on the evidence.** The sooner we do, the more likely we will be to put our community on the **road to greater prosperity that is shared by all.**