

**Chapter Eight — We Need Our Government And Our
Community Leaders At All Levels To Support The Success Of
All Children In Those Key First Years**

We are at a point in the history of our country where we need the people who run our local, state, and national governments — and where we need the people who lead each of our communities — to understand clearly the key issues that are involved in early childhood development.

Far too many of the people who lead us today in those areas have almost completely failed to either understand those issues or to address them in any relevant, meaningful, or useful way.

There are a few cities where local leaders have become aware of the potential to help children in those months and key years and a small number of people in legislative positions in various settings have begun to be aware of those issues — but the vast majority of relevant leaders for both our government and our various community groups have been entirely unaware of those issues and opportunities.

We need our leaders in all settings to do a significantly better job of dealing with those issues of early childhood brain strengthening and development.

We can't afford to have our leaders in governmental positions ignore those issues and we can't afford to have leaders who do not know the biological fact and functional reality that those first three years of life are the time when our children build major elements of brain capacity for their entire lives.

We need leaders to understand those issues and we need leaders to do what needs to be done at local, community, state, and national levels to make sure that we help our children get the support that each developing brain needs in those key years.

Community Leaders And Governmental Leaders Have Failed

Us On Those Issues

Almost our entire current leadership has fairly consistently failed us on that particular issue at every level of government up to now.

Government leaders have not been alone in that failure. Far too many of our community leaders for our various ethnic, racial, cultural, and religious groups have also not done a good job of leading for their own groups on those key, life changing issues as well.

Groups of people who are experiencing learning gap issues for their groups have had leaders who are deeply concerned about those learning gaps

— but those leaders have been almost unanimously silent and universally unaware of the underlying first years of life brain exercise realities that are actually creating those gaps.

The government policy that has been created to deal with that set of issues for those specific years is almost a void.

Leaders in a number of settings have encouraged support for our kindergarten programs and there is growing prekindergarten program and preschool program support as well in many settings. But our leaders have almost completely ignored, overlooked, or misunderstood the fact that those kindergarten and prekindergarten support efforts that engage with each child only after children are four or five years old will fail to close the gap for all of the children who did not get their needed brain building interactions in those first three key months and years of their life.

Major First Year Gaps Can't Be Erased In Kindergarten

The reading deficits and the learning problems for children who have fallen far behind in those first months and years of life cannot be erased in the kindergarten years or even in the immediate prekindergarten years for those children.

The children who enter kindergarten with vocabularies of only hundreds of words rather than thousands of words are far behind at that point in their lives and — for no fault of their own — the vast majority of those children will never catch up.

Scientists can measure brain differences in children as early as 18 months — based directly on whether or not the brains of children were individually exercised in the first year of life for each child.

The people who lead us in both our community groups and our government need to understand those issues.

That understanding about those key early year brain development issues has not been happening. That particular set of issues, risks, problems, opportunities and functional failures that exist relative to early childhood brain development for our children has been entirely invisible and off the agenda for the people who make the laws and who create both the processes and the cultures that govern us and guide us in almost all settings.

That Is Not Intentional Ignorance

That is not intentional failure. That lack of leadership support for children's development in those first key years is not because our leaders in any settings want any child to fail in any of those key areas of development.

People who are serving in government and in-group leadership roles at multiple levels do care deeply about the fact that many children are falling behind other children and those sets of leaders are also concerned about the functional problems and the learning gaps that exist for groups of children in too many school systems.

The fact that we have reading capability deficits so extreme that we have settings where the average score for the white children is actually double the reading score of Black, Hispanic, or American Indian children has become a huge cause of concern for many of our leaders.²

In the school districts of Minnesota, 51 percent of the eighth grade white students were proficient readers, compared to only 21 percent of the Hispanic students and 17 percent of the Black students. Those numbers and those kinds of differences in reading level skills between groups of people are echoed today in multiple other communities across the country where the capability levels of students are being measured by group.⁷²

People in government do care about those issues and those disparities — and people in leadership roles in each group in each community do care as well about teen delinquency, about school dropouts, and about the

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widening functional gaps in other areas that also exist in too many settings for far too many of our children.²

But very few people in our government settings has been linking those problems and those significant gaps between groups of children back to the early year child interaction levels for each child and to the fact that we did not do a good job of supporting neuron linkages for the children who have fallen behind in the three key and invaluable development years that happen at the beginning of each child's life.

Those gaps in learning levels were all created by not helping each of the children who have fallen behind in those key first years. The gaps are painful and damaging to many people — and those gaps did not have to happen... because the children from each group who do get that help in those key years do not need to fall behind.

Our Government Bodies Have Not Been Holding Hearings On

Those First Year Issues

Almost no one in positions of power in major areas of this country has been aware of those specific functional and operational issues or time frames. Almost no one in governmental circles at any level has been

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spending time thinking about those issues and then holding hearings and coordinating public discussions about how we can deal with that reality and how we can take advantage of the obvious and high value opportunities for our children and our society that those facts about early brain development create.

There have been some encouraging exceptions to that pattern — and several communities have begun to do work of helping their children in those first years. Cities like Seattle, Boston, San Antonio, and Oakland are all beginning to work with children in those age categories to stimulate the early year learning capacities of their children.

New York City has a voluntary early literacy-learning program and a mayor who is focusing some attention on those issues. Chicago has some independent programs — like the very impressive Thirty Million Words program started by Dr. Dana Suskind — that are now set up to help a number of their children. The city of St. Paul and the city of Minneapolis looking at some early childhood years child development efforts.

Those programs are all encouraging, and all need significantly more momentum to close the relevant learning gaps in those settings.

People Are Concerned About The Learning Gap

The learning gaps themselves are very visible in many communities and school systems.

There has been a major and very real level of concern expressed by many people in many settings about the large and growing learning gaps that exist in their communities. The reading gaps showing very different average performance levels for our Native American, African American, and Hispanic children have been well documented by a number of sources and people in every setting are alarmed about those gaps and want them to be alone.

Those gaps in reading levels and a similar set of gaps that exist between groups for basic mathematic skills for children are major and those gaps are beyond dispute.

People in multiple settings are increasingly concerned, alarmed, and even angry about those gaps. All of those reactions are entirely appropriate because those gaps represent much more difficult lives for the children at the low end of the learning level continuum.

Policy leaders, governmental leaders, and community leaders have all looked at those numbers and many leaders across the full political spectrum have expressed major interest in doing things to help reduce those gaps.

The learning gap issue is not being ignored everywhere. People in several settings now see the gaps and some people are proposing solutions and strategies to close the gaps in various settings.

The problem is that most of the programs that are being set up in various settings to close the gaps are focused on the wrong set of interaction.

Most Proposed Solutions Have Minimal Chance Of Success

A major problem relative to those proposed solutions in many settings has been that most of the plans and efforts to deal with those learning gaps have been targeted at solutions and strategies that have very low likelihood of actually succeeding in shrinking those gaps because those proposed solutions have been directed at older children.

Most of the current set of programs, proposals, and approaches in governmental settings that are intended to reduce or end those learning gaps have either not understand or simply missed the point of the early year brain development reality for each child — and many of the gap closing strategies have been directed at children after they are already in school.

People are trying to fix those gaps by fixing our schools. Schools in some settings are being blamed for the gaps and various programs to make our schools better to close the gaps are getting support in many settings.

Significant energy is being focused on figuring out how to improve our schools and how to enhance our teaching processes for the students who are already in school in an attempt to close the gaps that currently exist for the children who are currently in school.

We Can't Eliminate The Learning Gap By Improving Schools

As this book has pointed out multiple times, closing those learning gaps after the children are already in our schools is too late. To solve that set of issues and to have a gap free educational reality for our children, we clearly need to prevent the gaps before children get to school.

We need to prevent gaps rather than close gaps if we really want our gaps to disappear.

Making schools better is a very good thing. Every child who is learning ready will benefit from having better schools. There is no downside to improving our schools. There are many benefits that result from improving our schools.

We should not, however, expect to close the learning gap that we see in so many settings by improving our schools. That will have a relatively small impact on that particular problem because the learning gap for each

child who is challenged was created for each child in the first three years of each child's life.

A growing number of policy people, government leaders, and education leaders are now focusing their efforts on the immediate preschool years. Preschool is also too late for the children who have fallen behind by three.

Preschool improvement is a good thing to focus on — but that focus on improving the preschool years will have its focus on our four and 5-year-old children. Four and five aren't the major times of biological brain strength opportunity for each child. That time of great biological brain-building opportunity for each child happens in the years before the age of four.

Therefore, the approach and strategy of improving our preschool programs is good to do, but it falls short of the real time of major need and the great opportunity to close the personal learning gap for individual children.

It is a good thing for the country and it is a good thing for children that we are seeing significant and growing support at the local, state, and national levels for various categories of preschool support for children. It is good for children that our kindergarten and pre-kindergarten programs are

getting increasing levels of support from various governmental leaders and agencies in various settings that will make those programs better in a number of ways.

Making all of those programs better will be a very good thing for all of the learning ready children who are in those particular educational settings.

Preschool Programs Have Growing Support Levels

Unfortunately — those particular preschool programs will not close the learning gaps that we see today because they happen too late in life for the vast majority of the children who are already in a deficit position for learning readiness by age three based on the support that was received by each child in the first three years of their lives.

That time frame and those highly functional issues have been invisible in most policy settings. Helping children in those first key years has not been a part of the most commonly proposed legislative packages or strategies for most governmental settings.

Well meaning governmental leaders have tried to close the learning gaps by improving high schools, improving grade schools, and improving kindergarten and prekindergarten programs. All of those improvements are

very good and highly beneficial for learning ready children and all of those improvements will fail for the child who has fallen behind by 18 months and who has a tiny vocabulary at age three.

Helping those children at age four is too late for most of those children. We should not give up on those children and we need to do what we can to improve learning for each child who has fallen behind. But to fully succeed, we need interactions and interventions that begin before age one and that actually peak before age four if we hope to make those learning gaps vanish for all of our children.

We need children who are spoken to constantly and who have thousands of words in their vocabularies by the time they go through the prekindergarten classroom door.

Charter Schools Can Be An Asset

One of the fascinating sets of programs that have helped many children are the charter schools that have been set up in many settings. Some of the charter schools have clearly helped create a different learning trajectory for a number of children from low-income settings.

One of the key points to keep in mind about charter schools is that those schools tend to be voluntary enrollment schools. Parents make choices to have children attend those schools.

We know from our research that over half of low-income mothers read almost no books to their children. We also know from the research that roughly 30 percent of low-income mothers now read to their child every day.

The low-income mothers and fathers who read now to their children every day may well also be more likely to voluntarily enroll their children in a charter school — and to make the effort needed to get their child to the charter school every day. The low-income mothers and fathers who do not read at all to their children today could well be more likely also to not enroll their child in a charter school.

That set of relationships has not been studied, but it could be relevant to those issues based on what we know of that biological science and based on what we know are the very different pathways to reading levels that exist today for our lower income families.

Many of those schools have the potential to do great things for the children who are most ready to benefit from them. There is some likelihood in a voluntary enrollment situation that the parents who choose to use those

schools do so because those parents are highly supportive of their children at multiple levels.

We Can't Blame Our Leaders For Not Knowing That New Science

We now know that the entire set of processes for learning are anchored in the science of those first three years of brain development for each child.

We can't blame our leaders in either the government or in our community groups for not understanding those issues about those first three years of life for children in the past. We can't blame our leaders for not dealing with those issues in the past because some of the best and most useful science about brain development in children is relatively new.

Almost no one who knows what all of that research into early brain development tells us has actually been taking that science as a package and as a combined set of relevant and useful factors to our leaders — either to explain to our leaders in clear terms why so many children are failing in their personal reading and learning readiness or to propose actual solutions that our leaders can use to provide support for the children who are failing and to close the gaps for future years.

We can't blame leaders for not acting on any information about early childhood brain development that our leaders did not know. That lack of knowledge on those key issues has been the situation for almost all of our leaders up to now. It is entirely logical that our leaders have not used information that they did not know.

Up to now, our leaders have not had the knowledge base needed to lead us to better outcomes for each of our children using strategies and approaches that are focused on helping each of our very young children at those key points in the development process for each child.

The Days Of Ignorance On Those Issues Should Now End

The impact of those first three years has been invisible for government decision-making, so we have not seen bright leaders creating processes, approaches, and cultural learnings that can help all of those children avoid being unable to read.

Those days should now end.

Those days of ignorance for our leaders on that point should now be gone. The science is now clear. The consequences of the biology-based early year brain exercise time frames for each child are now clear. The functional impact of helping all children in those key years is also now clear.

Now that our leaders can each know that science and now that our leaders can finally understand those basic time frames and those universal brain-building processes, we need basic decisions made by our leaders about public policy, public education, and public health to be more fully informed and directly influenced by that set of facts and by those clear and indisputable functional realities.

Brain Strengthening Should Be a Public Health Agenda

We now need our leaders to lead on those issues — beginning with a public health campaign aimed at building better connections in baby brains.

We need a full boat public health campaign focused on helping our children build strong brains. We need the entire community to understand and support that campaign so that we can help every child.

We need all groups of people to help the people in their own group and we need all groups of people to share in the collective benefit as groups that we all receive from helping the children in every group.

We are all stronger when we are all stronger.

We need a public health campaign aimed at the biological development of stronger brains in every child, so that all groups do well as the result of that campaign.

That set of public health issues relative to our early years of childhood is as basic at a biological reality level as not having poison in our food supplies or not having damaging bacteria in our drinking water.

Brain growth is a basic biological issue that lends itself to a public health approach and a public health commitment. Keeping dangerous bacteria out of our drinking water has been addressed as a public health issue and that water safety issues has been addressed well for most of our country because we made safe water a universal public health issue.

We all understand the relevant science of safe water. We all know that the consequences of dealing with our water safety issues badly would create collective damage to everyone in those areas and those settings where dangerous water would create a danger and do real harm.

We Have Failed Too Many Children At A Pure Biological Level

We need a similar public health campaign to protect us against the damage done to children by not helping our youngest children build strong brains. We need a commitment to support that process for each child in those early years when each brain is built.

We have failed too many children in our country at a purely biological level. Not supporting children in the times of early biological brain development has an extremely negative set of public health consequences for the children who are not supported in that period of time.

The positive consequences that will result for our population from supporting all children in those key years can benefit all of us collectively when the issue is handled well. The negative consequences of not providing children with early brain development support can damage us all collectively when we deal with that issue badly — because we end up having people who are in real need at multiple levels for their entire lives if those brain strengthening needs are not met in those early years.

We Need The Learning Gap To Disappear

We need to make the learning gap disappear. The Health and Human Services Department of the U.S. Government has released studies showing the major gap in learning for high-income families compared to low-income families and also showing significant differences in learning levels by race/ethnicity.²

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Current research shows us that the gaps in learning for each child can be evident as early as nine months of age.

We know what interactions with children in those first three years create higher levels of learning capability — and we know what the impact is for low levels of interaction with each child in those years.

We also know that the levels of interaction with children tend to be different based on the income level of the parents for each child. Higher income children tend to have high levels of interaction with adults. Lower income level children tend to have lower levels of adult interactions in those key years. We need to understand and deal with those differences to help all children.

Income Levels Do Not Directly Affect Brain Growth

Income levels do not directly impact brain development or brain growth. Activity levels and brain exercise levels — not income levels — change brains. Income, alone, doesn't change the lives of children. Income, alone, has no impact on the biology or on the timing of brain development for any child.

But direct interaction with each child that is aligned with the biology of the brain development processes for each child does change lives.

Higher income parents tend to give their children higher levels of interactions in those key days, months, and years. Studies clearly show that those patterns exist for children based on the income levels of the family of each child.

Lower income children who get the same level of direct adult interactions as higher income children receive the same high levels of benefits as higher income children from those interactions.

We need children from all income levels to get those levels of adult interactions from trusted and caring adults in those key development years.

The patterns for groups of people that exist today relative to those interactions are pretty clear. There are many exceptions to the patterns, but the overall trends by group are highly relevant.

Both Word Gaps And Reading Gaps Exist

Studies tell us that lower income parents in our country, on average, spend less time reading, talking, and interacting to their very young children. We need to change those interaction patterns for those children.

Some low-income parents do have high levels of beneficial interactions with their children and the low-income children who get those higher levels of interactions clearly benefit, but there are studies that show

that, on average, our lower income families tended to speak fewer than 1,000 words per day to their infants.⁴

That number of spoken words in low-income families compares to 5,000 or more words that tend to be spoken to babies each day in higher income families.

Similarly, the average reading time per child for low-income families averaged less than 25 hours per child for low-income families for the prekindergarten years — compared to more than 1,000 reading hours per child for higher income families.

Higher income families had over a dozen children's books in their homes — and there was only one book in 300 very low-income families in one study.^{22,28}

We need to recognize the reality that one study showed that nearly a third of low-income mothers actually did read to their infant or baby every day. Those infants and babies in those low-income families who read every day were helped significantly by that reality in their own key times of development.

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But that research has shown us that over nearly percent of the low-income mothers who were studied had no books in the home and over half of the low-income mothers and fathers did not read to their children at all.²⁸

We Need All Parents To Know The Science Of Brain Exercise

In Those First Years

We need to recognize the significance and the reality that it is possible to read daily now to children in some low-income homes — and we need to recognize the reality that most children in most low-income homes are not being read to today.

We also know from their research that almost none of the low-income mothers who are not reading now to their children currently know the science or know the processes that are needed for strengthening their baby brains. We need to teach that information to every mother as part of our public health campaign to strengthen all brains.

All of that data points us clearly to the fact that we need to help lower income families read to their children and to interact directly with their children verbally in those key years of high opportunity — and that we need books in all homes regardless of income levels in those key first years.

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That entire set of studies tells us that we can change the learning status and ability levels for low-income children by increasing the interaction levels for each low-income child with caring and trusted adults in those key years of great biological opportunity.

That strategy is not magic. We can close the learning gaps by group by improving those interaction levels for each child from every group.

We need the people who run our government and who set our laws to understand those issues at a very basic level and we need our leaders in each community group to take steps to create the right levels of support for all of our children in each of our settings.

Over Half The Births In This Country Last Year Were To

Medicaid Mothers

That information about the difference in words spoken and the differences in the number of books read based on the income levels for the families of our youngest children is particularly important for us as a country because we are now, for the first time in our history, seeing the majority of births in this country coming from our low-income families.

Medicaid is, by definition, a program for low-income families. You have to have a very low-income level to be eligible for Medicaid. Medicaid

pays for health care for low-income people and Medicaid, therefore, pays for births for low-income mothers.

Last year, for the first time ever, the majority of births in this entire country were to Medicaid mothers. For the first time in our history, most of the births in our country are being paid for by our government. Most births in this country now are coming from families who are at our lowest income levels.

Our government actually paid for 51 percent of the total births that occurred in this country last year and that number and percentage will increase this year.

That fact, all by itself, tells us that the government has a direct level of opportunity and direct potential leverage and influence relative to over half of the births in this country. That leverage and that opportunity for our public programs begins at the moment of birth for all of those babies.

Medicaid Needs to Make Early Brain Support A Top Priority

Medicaid now needs to do what it can do to change the basic patterns that we have seen in the past for the early child neuron connectivity process support for the children in our low-income families.

Our state governments run the Medicaid program in each state — so we need all state governments to recognize that reality and take steps to ensure that the caregivers for Medicaid inform all mothers of Medicaid babies about the births and the science of exercising brains in those key years to build stronger brains.

Medicaid needs to incorporate early childhood learning into its expectations for care delivery and Medicaid programs in every state need to incorporate those sets of goals into a wide range of Medicaid-related communication processes and support systems that will help each of the children who are linked to the Medicaid system.

Cash Flow Should Support Early Childhood Learning

Cash flow has influence. We need to take advantage of the major opportunity that now exists with our care delivery processes and teams because Medicaid is paying for all of those births and is paying as well for the follow-up care for each child.

Medicaid now needs to make brain development support for infants and babies a top priority. Our Medicaid program should now require the caregivers for mothers and for children to educate new mothers about the

brain nutrition, brain exercise, and neuron connection and growth issues for every baby.

Studies and pilot programs have shown that parenting patterns tend to improve when mothers learn about those opportunities for their babies.

Medicaid should insist that caregivers teach parents about those issues and that Medicaid caregivers should also periodically evaluate whether the children are having problems in those early months and years when interactions and interventions can have huge impact and change lives.

Our Medicaid program already has benefits that provide immunizations and preventative screenings for each child. Our Medicaid program should now create a learning and teaching template for all of the caregivers who see newborn babies to have the caregivers educate each of the Medicaid mothers and families about the neuron connectivity biological realities and about the brain exercise opportunities that exist in that brief and important time frame for their new babies.

Medicaid is a combined state and federal program, but the states themselves functionally run our Medicaid programs. That means that we need each of the states to recognize the opportunities that are presented by those newborn babies and their care and we need each state to take action to

teach all Medicaid mothers the basic facts about how to strengthen their baby's brain.

States should mandate a basic and explicit level of public health education on those issues on the part of the caregivers who care for Medicaid babies and who treat Medicaid patients.

States should each figure out ways that work in the context of each state to provide the right support to that growing set of low-income mothers.

When states have a majority of their total births from mothers who are in the income levels where there historically have been no children's books in the homes, then states and communities need to figure out ways of getting those books into the homes and having those books used for the children.

The Likelihood Of Going To Jail Goes Up 60% For Dropouts

Every birth that doesn't get that needed level of brain linkage support in those first key years is a birth that is much more likely to end up as a child who drops out of school, becomes pregnant, and/or ends up in jail.

Those are very real consequences for both children and for states, cities, and school systems of not getting that early support do happen for each child.

This book has outlined those risks in some detail. The likelihood of ending up in jail increases by 60 percent for the children who dropped out of school because they were not reading ready when it is time for the child to learn to read.^{10,61,69}

Having students who drop out and who go to jail affects state and local budgets in several negative ways. Many states are facing major cost pressures now from having growing numbers of people in prison. Prisons now take up continually increasing amounts of state budget dollars.

States need to look at the cold hard reality that the number of people in jail and prisons will increase if the incarceration rates for non-readers holds constant and if the total number of non-readers in each state grows substantially because most children who are being born today in each setting are being born into low-income families that continue to have those patterns of early childhood interactions that were described earlier in this chapter and earlier in this book.

Many states are trying hard to improve reading levels for their students and to reduce dropout rates. There have been some excellent and well-meaning efforts in the country that have had minimal levels of success in most settings.

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Having state control over the Medicaid programs and having state control over related services provided to the low-income mothers gives each state a tool kit to use to help address both the reading deficits and the prison population growth by dealing proactively and intentionally with the early childhood issues that start people down those negative paths.

WIC Could Become A Brain Strength Support Tool As Well

At the combined state and Federal level, there is a very useful program called Women Infant and Children or WIC. WIC now skillfully counsels and coaches Medicaid mothers across the country individually and directly about the nutritional needs of their children. WIC even provides some food purchasing subsidies to buy healthy food for low-income mothers.

The current WIC program counseling for Medicaid mothers about food-linked nutrition should be extended immediately to cover direct counseling about direct brain nourishment for each child as well.

Both physical nourishment and brain nourishment qualify as public health strategies that we need to support.

The First Five Commission in Los Angeles County is doing a pilot program now to show how the WIC program can help with brain development issues for those children who are supported by WIC.

The Federal Government Supports Schools

On another relevant level, the Federal government also provides subsidies and financial support to education systems in all states and settings. Those subsidies that flow from the federal government to schools should be modified to add a requirement that schools in each setting work in some ways with the local community agendas and community resources to help educate mothers and fathers on those early childhood development issues and to also provide support of some kind where needed for parents of newborn children and infants who need that support to help their children.

State legislatures who are looking at their school systems and their state academic programs should all be fully aware of the early childhood biology and brain support needs as each state builds its education programs and agenda.

Legislatures who want schools to succeed at the highest levels should be thinking about the continuous learning continuum for children from birth through graduate school. State Legislatures should support and mandate

programs in each setting that can provide the needed support to the children and their families who most deeply need help for their children in those first key years.

Legislatures should look in particular at the day care settings that are used by working mothers for millions of children to make sure that the day care settings support the brain exercise processes needed by our very youngest children.

Instead of thinking of day care settings as purely babysitting environments, we need to figure out a variety of ways to have those settings read and talk in interactive ways with our children.

Day care can be an education tool at a very basic level and our legislative bodies should understand that opportunity and that reality.

Legislatures who only focus on the issues of prison costs and on the issues of school dropouts and who think of reading deficits and learning gaps as isolated and unrelated issues and who ignore or don't understand the upstream reasons for all of those behavior issues and upstream reasons for the learning failures for children are likely to spend far too much money on each of those expensive downstream areas with minimal success.

Those legislatures who ignore those first years are at high risk of spending too much money simply to remediate the damages done by those downstream issues without really improving anyone's life or getting better overall outcomes and results in either area.

The University of Chicago did some excellent research showing the sheer economic logic and impact of investing in early childhood to reduce the economic burden for the people who end up in prison because they did not receive early childhood support.²¹

Legislative bodies who are wrestling with those issues should look at that research.

Legislatures Need To Hold Hearings On Early Childhood

Support And Development

Legislatures should require whoever leads their state school systems — the state superintendents of schools or state commissioners of education — to present plans to the legislature that explain how they will help all children be school ready when each child enters school.

Local areas can come up with local programs to do that work in very creative ways. Various levels of community support programs can be created

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to help children in each setting. Communities can help children because the issues are specific to each child.

Brains develop one child at a time. Support, therefore, can and does also happen one child at a time.

Mayors Can Be Community Leaders On Key Development

Issues

Cities and mayors can take lead roles on those issues and build stronger cities and more unified cities by creating approaches and programs that succeed in each city.

Mayors can have a very high leverage impact on those early brain development issues for children in the communities they lead.

Legislatures need to be supportive of a wide array of approaches in various settings that end up helping each child.

Solid and useful programs that are focused on those earliest years are more likely to happen in multiple places if the legislatures clearly support those efforts and even require them to happen and exist in some settings.

Legislative committees should hold very explicit hearings on those issues to figure out best practices and to create alignment around making those issues a key part of the complete learning strategy for each state.

The people who run the education system in each state and community need to have a clear sense of the obvious value and advantage that can exist when all students are school ready when they get to school.

Legislatures can use various funding leverage points to ensure that the people who run the educational systems keep that full continuum of learning in mind for each child.

Creativity is needed at this point in time. We don't know all of the answers yet and we are still figuring out best practices. We need to be creative on building that support for our children.

We need to figure out best practices and we need to share what we learn about what works with one another in systematic ways.

We Need Leaders From Each Group To Lead On Those Issues

We also need the people who are our religious leaders and our community leaders for various groups in various settings to help create support for those children in each group for those key years of each child's life.

Chapter Six talked about the need for our ethnic, racial, and community leadership to understand those issues and to support both

approaches and cultural beliefs in each setting that help our children in those key, life changing years.

We need to address the learning gaps that exist today explicitly and effectively. There are major learning gaps now, on average performance levels, in our Native American, African American, and Hispanic communities.^{2,18} Those gaps are not genetic. Those gaps exist today because too many children in each of those groups in each of those settings did not get the early neuron strengthening support that each child needed in those first key years.

There are Native American communities where the vast majority of students today have low literacy levels and do not complete their school years. We have both Hispanic and Black communities in multiple settings with low reading levels and high drop out rates.

Those numbers could be reversed in each group in each site if all of the children in those communities received the support levels that are needed in those first years to make each child reading ready.

We Can't Shy Away From Those Issues

^{2,18}

Political correctness has caused some people to shy away from discussing those issues. Not discussing those issues and either pretending they didn't exist or simply not being aware that those issues exist has meant that many children's lives have been damaged and impaired in multiple situations and settings.

Being too politically timid to point out the problems and the opportunities has been a timidity that has damaged too many of our children.

We now need to make children a higher priority than political timidity.

It is time to stop the damage and end the impairment in every setting where it exists and we need to do that by creating help for each child who needs that help.

Our leaders now need to take the steps needed to save every child.

Each Community Needs To Help With Solutions

To do that, we need to help each of those communities with challenging outcomes to now help figure out ways to help each of those children in their communities.

All groups care about their children. Deeply. There are some horrific and personally damaging cycles for far too many children in some settings

that can each be broken — one child at a time — if we get the groups who are most relevant to each setting to be part of the solution. We need those cycles to break. We need to save each child.

Each setting, each group, and each family needs to be part of the solution process.

Each child saved is a child saved.

We need organizations and we need leaders who are credible in each of our minority communities where learning gaps exist today to lead public health awareness and parenting education at levels that can create a culture of early learning within each group.

We clearly do need our leaders to lead in that effort. Leaders steer cultures. We need all cultures to be steered by themselves and by each group's leaders toward early learning support — with credible leaders making that new belief system and that new set of behaviors happen in each setting.

We Need A Culture Of Health And We Need A Culture Of

Continuous Learning

Leaders can change lives by leading on this set of issues. There are very few things that leaders can do that will have a bigger impact on people's lives.

Overall, our leaders from all groups and all layers and levels of government need to set the tone by leading us in the right directions and by setting up a culture of continuous learning for us all that starts with birth.

As the book “Ending Racial, Ethnic, and Cultural Disparities in American Health Care” points out, we will all be well served and we will all be healthier when America creates a culture of health and then proceeds to build that culture around basic issues like active living and healthy eating.

We also need to put in place a culture of continuous learning — supported by all of us for all of us in ways that will create aligned behaviors and supportive collective approaches that meet the needs of our children from all groups and settings.

We need the people who run our communities, our schools, and our legislatures to understand that set of issues. We need the people in our Congress and the people who run our education departments at national levels to also recognize that set of issues and the problems and opportunities they create.

Ignoring Those Issues Will Not Allow Children With Small

Vocabularies To Do Well

Ignoring the problem will not help the children whose vocabularies before kindergarten contain only hundreds of words to do well, learn to read, and somehow succeed in a world where far too many children start so far behind the other children after those first key years. We need to help each child take advantage of the golden time for all children to build the strengths and the tools that will create success for entire lives.

We need leaders to understand those issues and we need leaders at multiple levels to help us all build a better future for all of our children. We have never needed our leaders more to help the children of this country than we need them now.

Leaders tend to be intelligent people. Leaders tend to have solid problem solving skill sets. We need those skill sets and those problem-solving behaviors applied to this set of issues and we need those skill sets and creativity applied by the people who lead us on this issue now.