

Preventing Crime with Quality Child Care: A Critical Investment in Colorado's Safety

A report from **FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS**

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Founded in 1996, FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS is a bipartisan, nonprofit, anti-crime organization led by more than 2,000 police chiefs, sheriffs, prosecutors and victims of violence. Thirty-one members are from Colorado.

The following staff members of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids contributed to production of this report: David Kass, Rita Shah, and Phil Evans.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Educational child care and after-school programs cut crime and save money.

- At-risk three- and four-year-olds randomly excluded from the Perry Preschool educational child care program in Michigan were five times more likely to become chronic offenders by age 27 than similar children who attended the program.
- At-risk children who did not receive quality educational child care in Chicago's Child-Parent Centers were 70 percent more likely to commit violent crimes by the age of 18 than similar children who attended the program.
- In housing projects without Boys & Girls Clubs for children and adolescents, incidents of vandalism were 50 percent higher and ratings of drug activity were 37 percent higher than in housing projects with clubs.

Low-income families need, but cannot afford, child care.

- Fifty-nine percent of children under age six in Colorado have both parents, or their only parent, in the workforce.
- The average fee at a child care center in Colorado is \$6,600 a year for a toddler—twice the average cost of public university tuition. Services for two children can exceed the annual salary of a full-time, minimum-wage earner.
- Nationwide, 79 percent of mothers with children between the ages of six and 13 are in the labor force.
- Many parents cannot afford to pay for after-school care at a center since the average cost of care is \$5,500 annually in Colorado.

Quality child care saves more money than it costs, but the federal child care subsidy program remains severely underfunded.

- Educational child care programs save more than \$7 (including more than \$6 in crime savings) for every \$1 invested.
- The federal government's child care subsidy program is so underfunded that it can serve only one in nine eligible children in Colorado.

Preventing Crime with Quality Child Care: A Critical Investment in Colorado's Safety

As an organization of police chiefs, sheriffs, prosecutors and victims of violence, the members of FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS believe in tough law enforcement. Dangerous criminals need to be behind bars. Law enforcement leaders, however, also know from years of experience that crime can be prevented before anyone is hurt or killed by helping kids get the right start in life. That is why law enforcement leaders nationwide have taken a hard-nosed look at what really works to prevent youth violence and crime, and the results are clear. Research shows that quality educational child care for preschool-age children and after-school programs for older kids lead to lower rates of crime, drug use, and welfare dependence, and to higher rates of high school graduation as the children reach adulthood.

Research Shows Quality Early Childhood and After-School Programs Cut Crime

Law enforcement leaders have long known from experience that intervening early in children's lives is the best way to prevent violence and crime. Researchers now have long-term studies to support what many have known from experience. The research results are dramatic and the evidence is clear: quality early childhood programs, especially for at-risk children, cut later crime. For example:

- Children from low-income families who were randomly assigned at ages three and four to participate in the High/Scope Perry Preschool program in Michigan were five times less likely than similar children from low-income families to become chronic lawbreakers by age 27. In

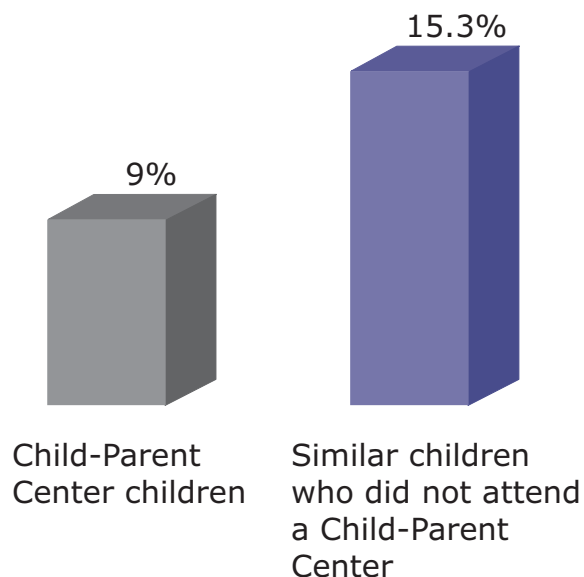
addition to these crime outcomes, academic and economic benefits were also found. Those who were not in the program were twice as likely to have been placed in special education for one year or more, and were 35 percent more likely to have received welfare or other means-tested social services as adults.¹

- Chicago's federally-funded Child-Parent Centers have served 100,000 three- and four-year-olds since 1967. Research shows that similar children from low-income neighborhoods who were excluded from the program were 70 percent more likely to have been arrested for a violent crime by age 18 than those who attended the program. This program will have prevented an estimated 33,000 crimes by the time the children already served reach the age of 18. In addition to these crime outcomes, academic benefits were also found. Those not in the program were 67 percent more likely to have been retained a grade in school and 71 percent more likely to have been placed in special education.²

- Children who were not enrolled in early childhood education centers with North Carolina's Smart Start quality improvement assistance demonstrated significantly more behavioral problems than children who attended centers with the Smart Start services. Specifically, they were twice as likely to rate poorly on behavior problems such as aggressive acts and poor temper control, anxiety, and hyperactivity in kindergarten.³ This is important because research shows that sixty percent of children with high levels of disruptive, aggressive behaviors in early childhood will

At-Risk Children Without Quality Pre-kindergarten were 70% More Likely to Commit Violent Crimes

An Arrest for Violence by Age 18



Chicago Child-Parent Centers

manifest high levels of antisocial and delinquent behavior later in life.⁴ If children are, instead, taught to get along with their peers early on, the lesson can last a lifetime.

- Large national studies showed that children who are traditionally at-risk of doing poorly in school and who were enrolled in high quality preschool programs had no more behavior problems at age eight than children who were not at risk. In contrast, when at-risk children received poor quality care their earlier levels of problem behaviors persisted.⁵

Research also shows that quality after-school child care can transform hours of soaring crime into hours of constructive, supervised activities where children learn values and skills needed to succeed in school and become contributing adults. For example:

- In a study conducted in several U. S. cities, five housing projects without Boys & Girls clubs serving children and adolescents were

compared to five receiving new clubs. At the beginning, drug activity and vandalism in the housing projects were the same. By the time the study ended, the projects without the programs had 50 percent more vandalism and scored 37 percent worse on drug activity.⁶

- Young people aged 10-16 who were randomly assigned to a Big Brothers/Big Sisters waiting list were almost twice as likely to begin illegal drug use and nearly three times more likely to hit someone compared to those who were given a mentor.⁷

- A study of children 5-15 years old who were enrolled in an after-school and summer program in a Canadian housing project showed that, compared to the two years prior to the program, the number of juvenile arrests declined by 75 percent.⁸

Few after-school programs have the funding necessary to produce such dramatic results. The results cited above were for programs operating with funds that allowed for the use of quality program designs and adequate numbers of caring, well-trained staff.

Most at-risk kids, even with poor child care services, become contributing adults. Nevertheless, failing to assure access to quality programs multiplies the risk that these children will become involved in crime and violence and decreases the likelihood that they will ever achieve their full potential.

Only One in Nine of Colorado's Eligible Children Receive Child Care Assistance

Though quality child care programs are shown to cut crime, federal child care subsidies only serve a fraction of eligible children in Colorado due to inadequate funding. The Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) is the principal source of federal funds for child care assistance. States, which are required to provide matching funds, can use these resources to help low-income families pay for child care and after school services while the parent(s) is employed, attends educational or

training programs, or looks for work.⁹ CCDBG funds can be used for children under 13 years of age (or up to 19 years if physically or mentally incapable of self-care or under court supervision).¹⁰

States have significant flexibility to design policies and determine who is eligible and how much child care providers will be paid by the state and by the parents while conforming to broad guidelines specified by the federal rules and regulations. The federal government, however, has established some parameters within which the states must operate.¹¹

Another federal government program, Head Start, also provides educational child care for children. There are, however, important differences between Head Start and CCDBG. First, Head Start provides services to 3- and 4-year-old children while CCDBG provides funds for children from birth to 13 years. Second, Head Start provides services to children in poverty while CCDBG serves low- and moderate-income families. Third, most Head Start programs offer only half-day services, leaving many families with the need for “wrap-around” child care services.¹² Families can use CCDBG funds to pay for those services. Nevertheless, neither Head Start nor CCDBG are coming close to serving all of those who are eligible. Many families qualify for both programs but are not receiving either.

In Colorado, CCDBG funds are provided to parents through the Child Care Assistance for Families with Low Income program, also known as the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP). The program serves low-income families who are working, seeking employment, or enrolled in school. The program is administered through county departments of social services, and specific eligibility requirements vary by county. The amount of child care subsidy is based on ability to pay and family size, and each family is required to pay a portion of the fees. The parent(s) chooses a child care

provider that best fits the family’s needs, and uses the funds to assist in paying for the services.¹³

Though the system was designed to help all eligible children by providing child care subsidies, inadequate funding allows only a small minority of children to be served. Nationally, only one in seven eligible children are receiving CCDBG subsidies.¹⁴ In 2002, CCDBG funds provided nationally by the federal government totaled \$4.8 billion and the states provided an additional \$1.1 billion in matching funds.¹⁵ An average of 2.1 million children nationwide were served monthly by these funds.¹⁶ Millions more are denied access to the child care services they need.

The situation is even more dire in the state of Colorado. CCDBG provides help to only one in nine eligible children in Colorado due to lack of funds.¹⁷ Federal CCDBG funds to Colorado totaled \$55.9 million in 2002 and the state provided \$22.5 million in matching funds.¹⁸ This total funding helped an average of 28,700 children each month.¹⁹

The need for increases in CCDBG funding becomes more urgent each year as the demand and cost for services rise. Fifty-nine percent of children under age six in Colorado have both parents, or their only parent, in the workforce.²⁰ Most children under six are in the care of someone other than their parents during the work day. The only question is

whether they are in “child storage” (for instance, parked in front of a TV set) or in quality programs that help them learn to get along with others and start school ready to succeed.

Many parents cannot afford the cost of quality educational child care. The average annual child care center costs in Colorado are \$6,600 for a toddler and \$5,800 for a preschooler²¹—twice the average cost of public university tuition.²² At that cost, preschool services for two children can exceed \$12,400—

“The average child care center costs in Colorado are \$6,600 for a toddler and \$5,800 for a preschooler annually—twice the average cost of public university tuition.”

more than the annual salary of a full-time, minimum-wage earner.²³ Many parents cannot pay this any more than they could pay private school tuition if public schools closed.

Low-income, working parents of school-age children face the same need for child care in the after school hours. Nationwide, 79 percent of mothers with children between the ages of six and 13 are in the labor force.²⁴ Half of the children in kindergarten through eighth grade are in the care of someone other than their parent before and after school on a regular basis.²⁵ Many are in the care of an older sibling or are caring for themselves.

National data show that at least eleven million children and teens are unsupervised after school.²⁶ This occurs, in part, because many parents cannot afford to pay for after-school care at a center since the average cost of care is \$5,500 annually in Colorado.²⁷ Therefore, when the school day ends, thousands of students across Colorado are turned out on the street without constructive activities or supervision. Research also shows that the after school hours are the most dangerous for young people. On school days, the prime time for juvenile crime is between 3 and 6 PM. The single most likely hour of the school day for a juvenile to commit an assault inflicting serious bodily injury, or an assault with a weapon is between 3 and 4 PM.²⁸

Educational Child Care and After-school Investments Save Taxpayers Money

Not only do educational child care and after-school care cut crime, but studies show that denying these services to children results in significantly higher costs to taxpayers. Extensive analyses of programs such as the High/Scope Perry Preschool Program in Ypsilanti, Michigan and the Chicago Child-Parent Centers demonstrate overwhelmingly that these are wise investments. For example:

- The High/Scope Perry Preschool program cut crime, welfare, and other costs so much that it saved more than \$7 (including more than \$6 in crime savings) for every \$1

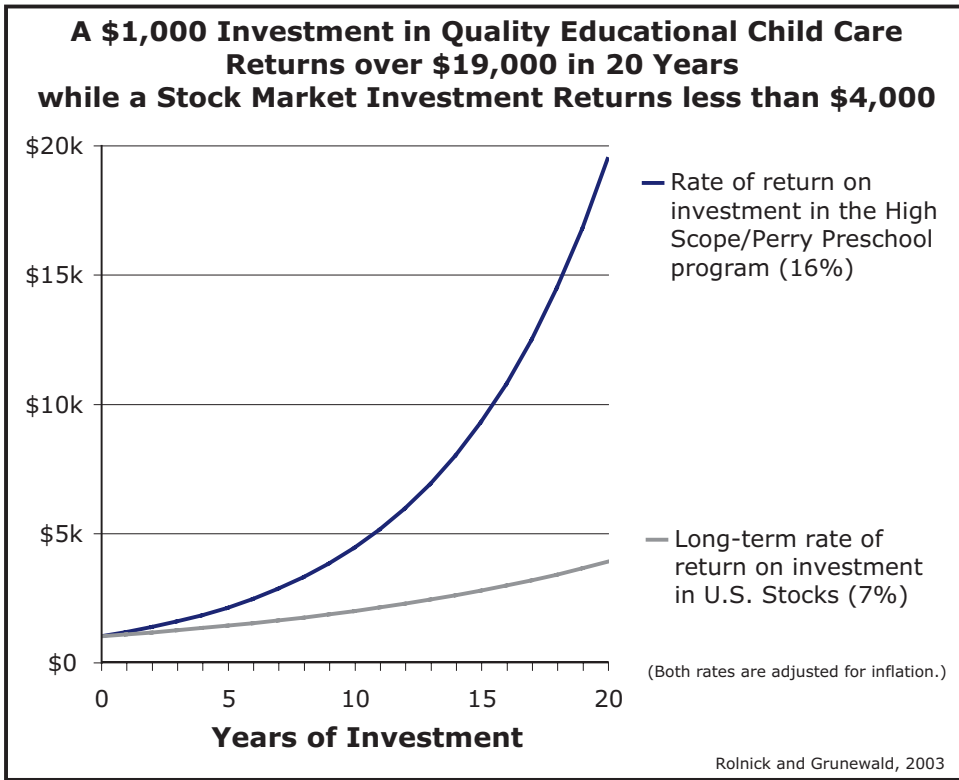
invested. These savings counted only the benefits to the public at large—in reduced costs of crime, welfare and remedial education and in taxes paid when the preschoolers became adult workers—without even taking into account participants' increased earnings or the increased contribution to economic growth those earnings represent.²⁹

- Dr. Steven Barnett, Director of the National Institute for Early Education Research, estimated that the High/Scope Perry Preschool Program produced nearly \$150,000 per participant in savings from reduced crime alone. Even after subtracting interest, which could have been earned on the preschool investment while the High/Scope toddlers were growing up, the net savings exceeded \$70,000 per participant in crime-related savings alone, and \$88,000 once welfare, tax and other savings were included.³⁰

- A RAND Corporation study found that even after excluding all benefits to crime victims and other citizens, and subtracting what could have been earned on alternative investments, savings to government alone from providing the High/Scope services came to twice the program's costs.³¹

- An analysis by Arthur Rolnick, Senior Vice-President and Director of Research at the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, showed that the return on investment in the High/Scope Perry Preschool Program was 16 percent after adjusting for inflation. Seventy-five percent of that return went to taxpayers in the form of decreased special education expenditures, crime costs, and welfare payments. In comparison, the long-term return on U.S. stocks is 7 percent after adjusting for inflation. Thus, an initial investment of \$1,000 in a program like the Perry Preschool will return over \$19,000 in 20 years while the same initial investment in the stock market will return less than \$4,000.³²

- The Chicago Child-Parent Center program is saving taxpayers, victims, and participants over \$7 for every \$1 invested (of which taxpayers alone save almost \$3) without even counting the value of preventing pain and



is critical to their future success and to the well-being of society as a whole... Society pays in many ways for failing to take full advantage of the learning potential of all its children, from lost economic productivity and tax revenues to higher crime rates to diminished participation in the civic and cultural life of the nation."³⁶ Failing to provide access to quality educational child care and after-school programs squanders billions.

suffering for crime victims. For the children already served, this translates to a savings of \$2.6 billion.³³

Investments in after-school care programs, especially for the children most at risk of sliding into delinquency or becoming victims of crime, also pay for themselves many times over, not only in lives, but in tax dollars as well. For example, the after-school program in the Canadian public housing project (that resulted in a 75 percent reduction in juvenile crime) saved government agencies twice the program's cost.³⁴

Economists Agree: Failing to Invest Squanders Billions

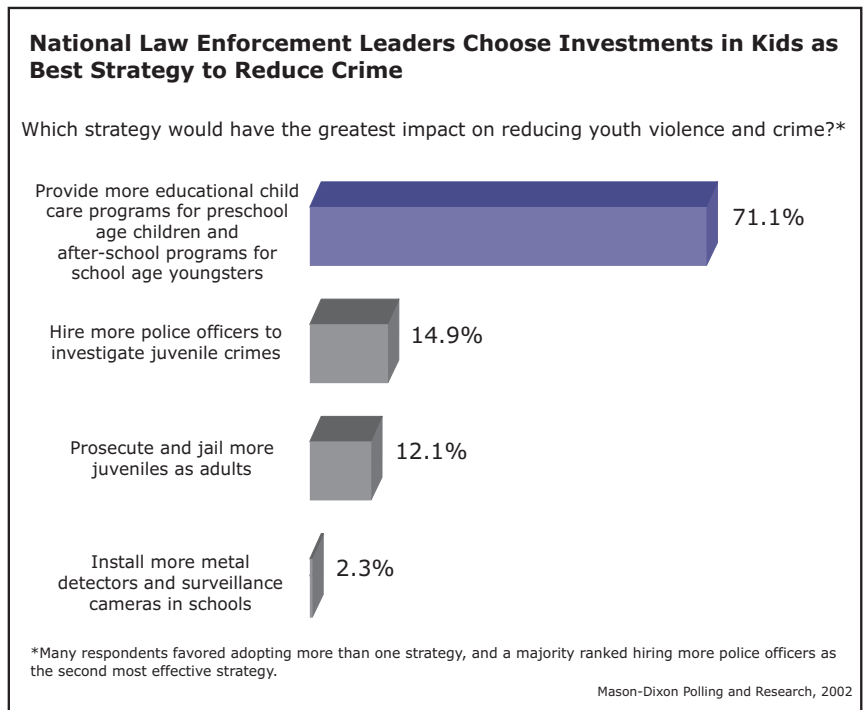
Many economists have concluded that early childhood programs are among the best investments government can make in education. William Gale and Isabel Sawhill of the Brookings Institution wrote that investing in early childhood education provides government and society "with estimated rates of return that would make a venture capitalist envious."³⁵ The Committee for Economic Development, a national group of business leaders, says that "helping all children start school ready to learn

Law Enforcement Backs Investment in Child Care and After-School Programs

The more than 2,000 members of FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS are determined to put dangerous criminals behind bars. Those on the front lines in the fight against crime also know the most powerful weapons against crime are investments like educational child care and quality after-school programs that help kids get the right start in life. In response to a Mason-Dixon Polling and Research survey, an overwhelming 71 percent of the nation's law enforcement leaders chose providing "more after-school programs and educational child care programs" with the greatest impact in reducing youth violence and crime.³⁷ The Major Cities Chiefs' Organization, the Fraternal Order of Police, the International Association of Chiefs of Police, the National District Attorneys' Association, and the National Organization for Victim Assistance have endorsed investments in quality educational child care programs and after-school programs. It is time to ensure that more children have access to educational child care and after-school programs that are proven to save money and cut crime.

Law enforcement leaders and researchers agree that more of our nation's children, especially those most at-risk, must be given access to quality child care programs if later crime is to be prevented. Like children throughout the country, however, Colorado's children remain severely underserved. As reported earlier, CCDBG is so under-funded that it can serve only one in nine eligible children in Colorado.³⁸ Sadly, Colorado has restricted eligibility, which has reduced the number of working low-income families who qualify for assistance.³⁹ Assistance from the federal level is critically needed especially now when Colorado, like most states, is faced with rising child care costs and a tight state budget. Without increased CCDBG subsidies, thousands of eligible children will continue to be denied

access to quality educational child care and after-school programs that have been proven to help children avoid a life of crime, graduate from high school and become responsible citizens.



Endnotes

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- ⁹ Federal funding for CCDBG has two components: mandatory and discretionary funds. The mandatory funding stream itself has two parts: mandatory and matching funds. The former is the base amount that is automatically available to states each year. Matching funds are those above the base funding amount that are allocated according to the number of children under age 13 in each state. States must put up state matching funds to draw down the federal dollars. Discretionary funds are available to states without a match requirement. See Schulman, K. (March, 2003). *Key facts: Essential information about child care, early education and school-age care*. Washington, DC: Children's Defense Fund.
- ¹⁰ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Child Care Bureau. (2003). *The Child Care and Development Fund (Fiscal Years 2002-2003)*. Retrieved from http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ccb/geninfo/ccdf02_03desc.htm
- ¹¹ Schulman, K. (2003, March). *Key facts: Essential information about child care, early education and school-age care*. Washington, DC: Children's Defense Fund. For example, states: a) may use CCDBG funds to serve families earning up to 85 percent of the state median income; b) must spend a minimum of four percent of their total CCDBG funds on improving quality, expanding supply, and providing consumer education; c) must require all providers (except certain relatives) who receive CCDBG funds to meet minimum health and safety standards; d) must set reimbursement rates for child care that ensure that eligible children have access to child care equal to the access available to children who are not receiving subsidies and must conduct a market rate survey every two years.
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- ¹⁹ Shulman, K. (2003, May). *Child Care and Development Block Grant: State enrollments estimated*. Washington, DC: Children's Defense Fund.
- ²⁰ The percentage of children under age 6 in Colorado who have both or their only parent in the labor force was determined by dividing the number of children under age 6 with both or their only parent in the labor force [n=200,096—which was computed by adding the following subtotals: 140,531 (children living with both parents/both parents in labor force); 17,470 (children living with father only/father in labor force); and 42,095 (children living with mother only/mother in labor force)] by the total number of children under age 6 (n=339,553). For these figures, see: U.S. Census Bureau. (2002). *Census 2000 summary file 3 (SF 3)—P46. Age of own children under 18 years in families and subfamilies by living arrangements by employment status of parents*. Washington, DC: Author.
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