

Success By 6: Investing in Our Youngest Citizens

A ONE-YEAR PROGRESS REPORT

May 2009

The brain develops rapidly before age five.¹ Yet brain development and learning can be stymied in the absence of adequate stimulation.² The learning environment during the first critical years has long lasting consequences that can ignite a cycle of success *or* a cycle of failure.

Economists have developed a long list of far-reaching benefits obtained by the provision of quality early education to at-risk children:

- Decreased grade repetition
- Increased high school graduation rates
- Higher achievement test scores
- Reduced time in special education
- Less crime in terms of both severity and frequency
- Less dependency on public supports
- Fewer teenage pregnancies
- Improved behavior and attitudes.³

Analyses of multiple longitudinal studies of quality preschool interventions show that success in early childhood leads to school success, boosting high school graduation rates and later productivity.⁴ Increased graduation rates translate into safer neighborhoods and communities.

Early preventive interventions are less costly than programs for children and youth who have fallen behind⁵ and far less costly than the societal impact of a high school dropout. Grade repetition costs \$5,500 per year. Dropouts during the 2007 school year alone represent a \$1.2 billion-dollar loss to Northeast Florida's economy over the course of their lifetime.⁶ Each additional male graduate provides a social benefit to the community estimated at \$1,170-\$2,100 annually in terms of reduced crime costs.⁷ Thus over a thirty-year period, communities save between \$35,100-\$63,000 per male graduate. Meanwhile, the high-end cost of high-quality early childhood education for 2 years is \$15,000.

Yet many of our children are not receiving quality early childhood education. In 2008, more than 4,000 Northeast Florida preschoolers were not enrolled in quality early education centers.⁸ United Way of Northeast Florida (UWNEFL) is addressing this gap through the Success By 6 (SB6) initiative.

SUCCESS BY 6

SB6 expands access to quality early education by closing gaps in eligibility guidelines for hardworking families - setting it apart from other early childhood initiatives. Many families earn too much to qualify for government childcare subsidies, yet too little to afford quality childcare. As a result, children from these families are at risk of entering school developmentally behind their peers.

Launched in Fall 2007, the initiative's targeted, measurable strategy evolved through eleven months of research by a Partnership of local experts in early childhood education, corporate partners and community stakeholders from across the region.

SB6 supports the high-quality early childhood education of three- and four-year olds by providing grants to attend high-quality early learning care. Eligible families earn 150%-200% of the Federal Poverty Level (\$31,800-42,400 annually for a family of four). Parents commit to attend periodic teacher conferences, participate in parent awareness training opportunities, and ensure their child attends at least 85% of classes.

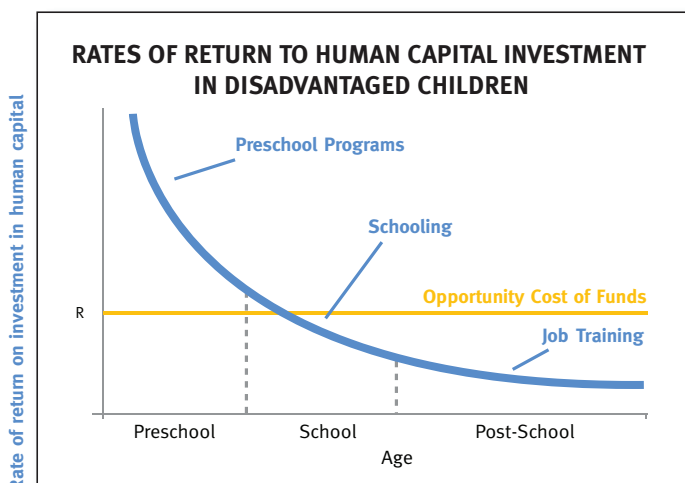
The Early Learning Coalition of Duval is United Way's lead partner in SB6 providing eligibility screening for families and funding for SB6 centers to purchase materials.

First Year Achievements:

- Increased school readiness compared to national normative population of peers
- Individual achievement gains on all readiness measures
- High levels of student and parent participation

“The real question is how to use the available funds wisely. The best evidence supports the policy prescription: Invest in the Very Young.”

James J. Heckman, PhD
Nobel Laureate



Source: Heckman 2007, Figure 12.

First Year Results

United Way designed a multiyear evaluation plan for SB6 in partnership with the Florida Institute of Education (FIE) at the University of North Florida. The plan calls for assessment of participant progress semiannually and at kindergarten entry through the state-administered Florida Kindergarten Readiness Screener.

The assessments given prior to kindergarten measure school readiness including letter recognition, number sense and operations, and language development.

Increased School Readiness:

In Pilot Year 2007-08, school readiness of participant children increased relative to a national normative population as measured by the Bracken Basic Concept Scale, Third Edition: Receptive School Readiness Composite.⁹

This change in standing resulted from a marked increase among ability levels of participant children:

- Of SB6 children assessed as *Very Delayed* in Fall 2007, 6% moved into higher ability categories by Spring 2008.
- While no SB6 children were assessed as *Advanced* at program onset, 7% scored in this range in Spring 2008.

Individual Achievement Gains:

In fact, children demonstrated statistically significant gains over the course of the school year on all school readiness measures administered.¹⁰

The individual achievement gains included:

- Improved vocabulary development — a 26% increase over the course of the school year
- Improved school readiness — a 15% increase over the course of the school year
- Improved understanding of direction/position, self-social awareness, texture/material, quantity, and time/sequence

High Levels of Student and Parent Participation:

SB6 children had an average attendance rate of 95%. That's 10% higher than the level required for continued program participation. All participating parents attended *Born Learning* workshops (see page 4), along with over 2,500 other parents and/or caregivers during 2007. A 90-day follow-up survey of *Born Learning* participants found that 95% continue to use acquired knowledge and skills. Further, parents and caregivers

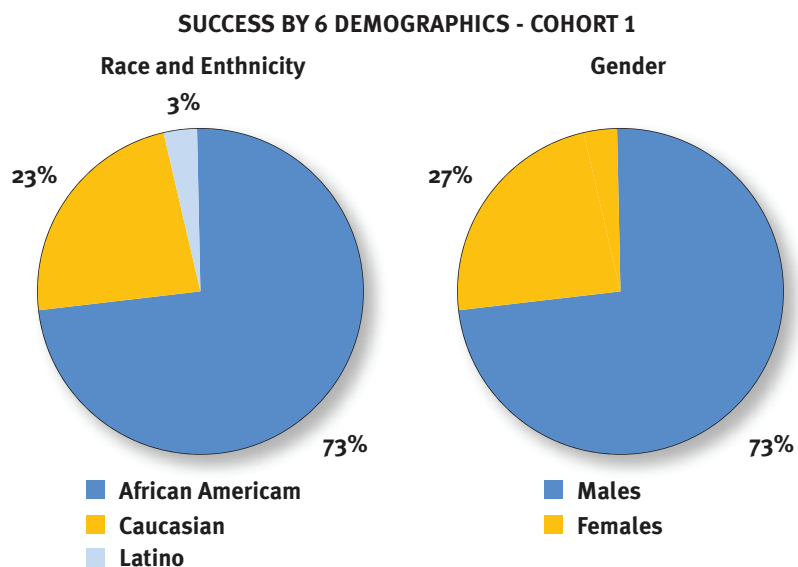
indicated they share what they learn, resulting in a multiplied outreach impact of at least 7,600 parents and caregivers.

Cohort 1 Participant Families

SB6 supported the quality education of 31 three-year olds in Pilot Year 2007-08. Before receiving a SB6 grant 86% were in unrated or low quality settings.

The majority of children served were African-American and male (55% were African-American male). Studies have shown that the lifetime economic impact of early education is greater for males.¹¹

Over 76% of the mothers of participating children had some level of post-secondary education, with only 7% having less than a high school education.¹²



Engaging Parents

Stimulating active participation among parents in the social, emotional, and physical growth of their child is an important component of the SB6 strategy. Parent engagement activities consist of *Born Learning* workshops and regular parent/teacher conferences.

Achieving Success From SB6 Files

Three-year-old Jeremy* exhibited signs of serious developmental delays. The SB6 team quickly connected with partners at Child Find to place him in a public school with the expertise required for an appropriate, specialized intervention plan. Had his family not enrolled in SB6, his delays may not have been identified or addressed until after Jeremy began kindergarten. The SB6 team's quick and knowledgeable response allowed Jeremy to begin therapy two years early.

* Name has been changed to maintain confidentiality.

SUCCESS BY 6: Year 2 Expansion

Building on Year 1 success, United Way is providing SB6 grants to 100 children in 2008-09. Grants were awarded to a new cohort of 72 three-year olds, 10% of whom live in Clay County. Leveraging state dollars provided to four-year olds through the Florida Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) program, partial grants were given to 28 second-year SB6 participants to provide full-day, year-round quality education. (The free VPK program provides funds for half-day, school year preschool.) Additionally, support has been expanded from six high-quality centers to fourteen centers, including two new centers in Clay County.

Dawning Progress

Florida has made great strides in improving early childhood education since passage of the “School Readiness Act” in 1999. Performance standards for three-, four-, and five-year old children and universal voluntary prekindergarten for four-year-old children have been established. Today more of our children are entering school ready to learn.

School readiness scores have steadily improved statewide. Consistent increases have been seen over the past four years on two key readiness indicators—letter naming and initial sound fluency—have consistently improved over the past four years.¹³

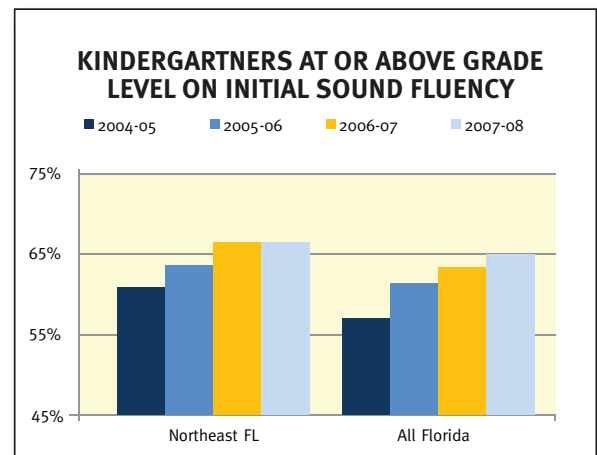
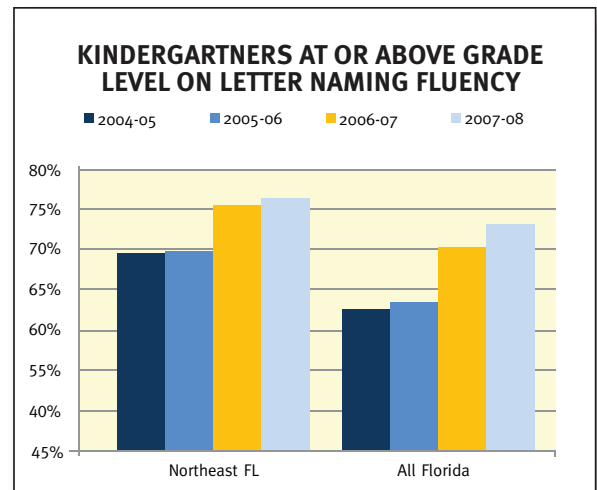
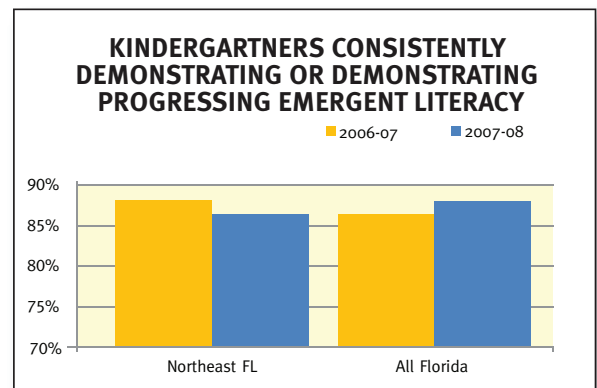
Similar progress is being seen in Northeast Florida. Our children are outperforming statewide peers on two of three readiness measures.

Jacksonville Mayor John Peyton has made early literacy a key priority. The Jacksonville Early Learning Partnership formed during the mayor’s first term has forged a community vision for high-quality school readiness education and literacy to make Jacksonville the most literate community in Florida. United Way has also prioritized early childhood education increasing investment in this area from \$1.3 million in 2006 to \$2.5 million in 2008.

“Investment in early childhood development yields an extraordinary return, far exceeding the return on most investments, private or public.....”

**Art Rolnick
and Rob Grunewald**

Yet work remains. Based on three assessments, between 14 and 34% of Northeast Florida children are not ready to learn language and literacy skills at kindergarten entry.¹⁴ An estimated 40% of Northeast Florida childcare programs need additional support to offer the high-quality early learning opportunities¹⁵ essential to obtaining high returns. And the current economic situation is resulting in more families unable to afford high quality early learning for their preschoolers.



Source: Data for the above charts was obtained from the Florida Department of Education website (<http://www.fldoe.org/earlyLearning/>). Note that district results of Baker, Clay, Duval, Flagler and Nassau counties were combined to form the Northeast Florida test results.

SB6 Early Learning Centers: Year 1 Centers:

- All Saints Early Learning Center
- Episcopal Children's Services-Exchange South
- The Oaks
- New Dimensions Learning Center
- The Salvation Army Child Development Center
- St. Catherine's Episcopal Preschool

Centers Added in Year 2:

- Aldridge Day Care
- Happy Acres Ranch
- Methodist Children's Village
- Punkin Place Child Development of Jacksonville
- Christ the King Child Care
- All About Kids, Inc.
- Childtime Learning Center (Clay)
- Gingerbread Learning Center (Clay)

Born Learning™

United Way's free, interactive *Born Learning™* workshops help parents, grandparents, and other caregivers explore ways to enhance their child's development and turn everyday moments into *learning moments*. UWNEFL developed these workshops drawing on the research-based materials provided by United Way of America, in partnership with Civitas (a national child development research institute), and the Ad Council. Open to the community, these workshops are funded by the Jacksonville Children's Commission, the Early Learning Coalition of Duval, and United Way of Northeast Florida. Workshop topics include:

- Ages and Stages
- Dads Are Different
- Playing the Games
- Effective Discipline
- Learning on the Go¹⁶

Participant Comments:

"The information shared was practical and usable."

"This workshop was fun and educational for me as well as my soon to be new born."

"This workshop saved our marriage, it was like the instructor had been watching us at home, she seemed to know exactly what we were struggling with at home. This was the best class ever! Thank you so much for offering this."

"I think all parents need to take a parenting class like this."

To learn about workshops near you, call 2-1-1.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Shore, R. (1997). *Rethinking the Brain: New Insights into Early Development*. New York: Families and Work Institute.
- 2 Perry, B. D. (2003) *Effects of Traumatic Events on Children*. The Child Trauma Academy.
- 3 Heckman, J. J., & Masterov, D. V. (2007). *The Productivity Argument for Investing in Young Children*. Retrieved from <http://www.nber.org/papers/w13016>. See also Barnett, W. S. (2004). Benefits of Preschool Education, PowerPoint Presentation. National Institute for Early Education Research, www.nieer.org. Retrieved from www.nieer.org and Rolnick, A., & Grunewald, R. (2003). *Early Childhood Development: Economic Development with a High Public Return*. <http://www.minneapolisfed.org/pubs/fedgaz/03-03/earlychild.cfm>: The Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Heckman, J. J., & Masterov, D. V. (2007). *The Productivity Argument for Investing in Young Children*. Retrieved from <http://www.nber.org/papers/w13016>.
- 6 Estimate based on the average additional lifetime income if one class of dropouts graduated. The number of students who failed to graduate with their class in 2007 was multiplied by \$270,000 (estimated lifetime earnings difference between a high school dropout and a high school graduate). J. C. Day and E. C. Newburger. The big payoff: Educational attainment and synthetic estimates of work-life earnings. Alliance for Excellent Education, "Issue Brief: The High Cost of High School Dropouts What the Nation Pays for Inadequate High Schools. Florida School Indicators Report, <http://data.fldoe.org/fsir/>. For more information on the high school dropout crisis in Northeast Florida, see United Way of Northeast Florida's October 2008 Issues Brief, http://www.uwnefl.org/Documents/UWAchieversForLife_OneYearProgress.pdf
- 7 Lochner, L., & Moretti, E. (2004). The effect of education on crime: Evidence from prison inmates, arrests, and self reports. *The American Economic Review*, 94(1), 155-189.
- 8 Early Learning Coalition of Duval (2008). www.elcofduval.org.
- 9 Ibid. Measures included the Early Childhood Observation System Expressive Vocabulary subtest (EVT-2) and ten BBBS-3:R subtests. The BBBS-3:R is a battery of 10 subtests designed to measure understanding of concepts relevant to development. Five of the subtests assess formal school readiness and form the School Readiness Composite (SRC): Colors, Letters, Numbers/Counting, Sizes/Comparisons, and Shapes. The remaining five subtests include: Direction/Position, Self/Social Awareness, Texture/Material, Quantity, and Time/Sequence. Scores on the BBBS-3:R scale fall into one of five categories ranging from *Very Delayed* to *Very Advanced*. The EVT-2 assesses expressive vocabulary and word retrieval. EVT-2 scores are standardized and adjusted for natural maturation to allow for the detection of gains resulting from program intervention. See Bracken, B. (2007). *Bracken Basic Concept Scale-Third Edition: Receptive (BBBS-3:R)*. San Antonio, TX: Harcourt Assessment, Inc. and Williams, K. T. (2007). *Expressive Vocabulary Test, Second Edition*. Minneapolis, MN: Pearson Assessments.
- 10 Florida Institute of Education at University of North Florida (August 2008). *United Way Success By 6 Evaluation Report: 2007-08*. Jacksonville, FL.
- 11 Heckman, J.J., & Cunha, F. (2006). Investing in Our Young People. University of Chicago. Note: The greater return for males is a result of the intervention on crime.
- 12 Florida Institute of Education at University of North Florida (August 2008). *United Way Success By 6 Evaluation Report: 2007-08*. Jacksonville, FL.
- 13 Prior to 2006-2007 the state of Florida administered the *School Readiness Uniform Screening System (SRUSS)* to first-time kindergarteners. The SRUSS utilized two of the three screening tools that comprise the FLKRS -the DIBELS Initial Sounds and Letter Naming Fluency tools. Florida Department of Education. *Florida Kindergarten Readiness Screener State Report of District Results*. www.fldoe.org/earlylearning.org.
- 14 Florida Department of Education. *Florida Kindergarten Readiness Screener State Report of District Results*. www.fldoe.org/earlylearning.org.
- 15 Early Learning Coalition of Duval (2008). www.elcofduval.org.
- 16 For more information on United Way's free, interactive *Born Learning™* workshops, including a current schedule of workshops, please visit http://www.uwnefl.org/Partnerships_BornLearning.asp.