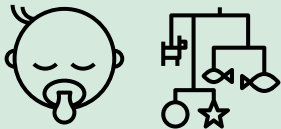
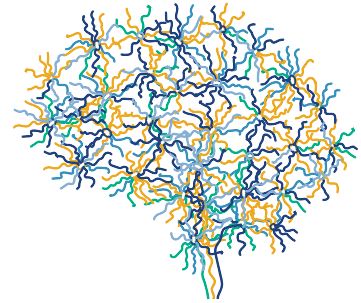


Children who start ahead stay ahead: Investing in a strong start for every child

The earliest years of a child's life are a crucial period of development, with the brain forming more than **1 million new neural connections per second**.¹

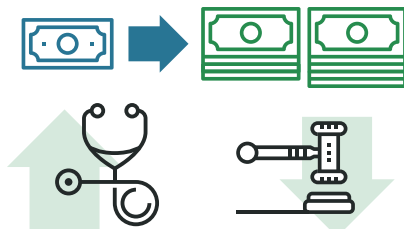


Healthy environments and **rich experiences** during the early years provide a strong start and can have a lasting impact on achievement, health, and even earnings.²

But **risk factors**, such as poverty, low parental education, and a single-parent household, can result in developmental delays that compound over time.^{2, 3}

Studies show that participating in quality early childhood education—specifically, from preschool through age 7—has a positive effect on **cognitive** and **linguistic development** and can help **close gaps** caused by risk factors.^{2, 4}

Investing in young children's social-emotional development also promotes long-term success, leading to higher **self-esteem**, increased **motivation**, and **better relationships** with peers.^{3, 5}



Every \$1 invested in early childhood programs for at-risk children reaps \$4–\$9 in return through improved overall health and economic productivity and reduced crime and social spending.^{1, 2}

Some ways states are supporting children's early development include identifying and addressing gaps in children's school readiness, working to meet children's social-emotional needs, and forming cross-agency collaborations to align efforts and link data systems.

References

¹ U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education. (2016). *2016 Title II reports: National teacher preparation data*. Retrieved from <https://title2.ed.gov/Public/Home.aspx>

² Karoly, L. A., Kilburn, M. R., & Cannon, J. S. (2005). *Early childhood interventions: Proven results, future promise*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation. <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED489459>

³ Bakken, L., Brown, N., & Downing, B. (2017). Early childhood education: The long-term benefits. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 31(2), 255–269. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1136161>

⁴ Pre-Kindergarten Task Force (2017). *The current state of scientific knowledge on pre-kindergarten effects*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED574393>

⁵ Boyd, J., Barnett, W. S., Bodrova, E., Leong, D. J., & Gomby, D. (2005). *Promoting Children's Social and Emotional Development Through Preschool Education* (Preschool Policy Brief). New Brunswick: New Jersey. National Institute for Early Education Research. Retrieved from <http://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/report7.pdf>

The goals of MECERA are to

1 Increase the Midwest region's capacity to access, conduct, interpret, and make sense of early childhood education research.

2 Support the use of early childhood education research in decisionmaking at the state and local levels.

The primary focus of MECERA is on early childhood education in Illinois. In addition, a community of practice connects key stakeholders across the region and is an active partner in the research process.

Projects

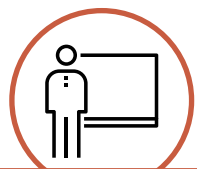
For more information about the alliance and associated projects, please visit <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/midwest>.



Research

Examining Illinois children's knowledge and skills at kindergarten entry.

The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) is implementing a new, statewide kindergarten entry assessment, the Kindergarten Individual Development Survey (KIDS). REL Midwest will use KIDS data to examine the skills that Illinois children have at kindergarten entry and variations in these skill levels across subgroups and schools. In addition, researchers will collect information from teachers and principals about obstacles encountered in administering the KIDS assessment and collecting data. MECERA members—and ISBE in particular—can use this information to ground discussions about how to better serve groups of children, schools, and districts. In addition, ISBE can use findings to plan future training and professional development materials for teachers administering the KIDS assessment.



Coaching

Interpreting KIDS data.

To help teachers effectively use KIDS data to improve instruction, REL Midwest is hosting in-person and virtual workshops on the KIDS assessment. The workshop series provides kindergarten teachers, as well as school and district administrators who support them, with an opportunity to collaborate with colleagues and analyze classroom-level KIDS data under the guidance of REL Midwest facilitators and data use experts. Participants will use the knowledge and skills gained to interpret KIDS data, set goals, and tailor classroom instruction.



Engaging our region.

Connecting and sharing research, training, and coaching projects with stakeholders and practitioners is critical to MECERA's goal of encouraging the use of research in decisionmaking.

Some of MECERA's engagement efforts include an [e-newsletter](#) highlighting the alliance and its work and a [webinar](#) on equipping parents to support kindergarten readiness. Other planned engagement includes an in-depth blog series, a video, and a public TV documentary.

For more information

visit us at
<https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/midwest>

follow us on Twitter
[@RELMidwest](https://twitter.com/RELMidwest)



Disclaimer: This work was funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (IES) under contract ED-IES-17-C-0007, administered by American Institutes for Research. The content of the infographic does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. government.

Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Midwest is part of a network of 10 RELs funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences. Each REL serves a designated region of the country and helps states and districts use data and research to address policy and practice issues with the goal of improving student outcomes.