



EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT THEORY OF CHANGE

Theory of Change

The Mary Black Foundation’s Early Childhood Development logic model and theory of change was created to guide the organization’s work over the next 15 years. It depicts specific strategies the Foundation is using to create short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes that support the organization’s mission - to invest in people and communities for improved health, wellness, and success in Spartanburg County.

In 15 years, the Foundation expects that its work to support **Ready Families**, who have the skills needed to support child development and learning, coupled with **Ready Systems** of Early Care and Education, including high quality preschool programs (public, private, and faith-based), will lead to **Ready Children**: children who enter kindergarten prepared for success in school and in life. A Ready Family has adults who understand they are the most important factor in a child’s readiness for school and provide steady and supportive relationships, ensure safe and consistent environments, promote good health, and foster excitement about learning. Ready Systems of Early Care and Education provide high quality learning interactions and environments with the intention of reinforcing the child’s individual strengths and challenges. Ready Children excel in the five domains of development – language and literacy, social and emotional, cognitive and general knowledge, approaches to learning, and physical and motor.



Strategy

The Foundation’s strategy is to create Ready Systems, Ready Families, and Ready Children through four approaches: (1) Grantmaking and Leveraging Resources, (2) Capacity Building and Technical Assistance, (3) Communications and Advocacy, and (4) Strategic Alliances and Convening.

The work is informed by a growing body of research that demonstrates that early influences—whether positive or negative—are critical to the development of children’s brains and their lifelong health. A child’s brain develops more rapidly in the first few years of life and that growth, which depends on good health, positive experiences, and nurturing relationships, lays the foundation for all future development. Further, research supports an investment in teen pregnancy prevention to improve early childhood development because children born to teens do not perform as well as children of older parents on key indicators including communication and literacy, cognition, and social skills.

To achieve its short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes, the Foundation partners with and invests in nonprofit and governmental organizations that do the following:

- Support and advocate for quality early care and education that supports and nurtures growth within the five domains of development,
- Educate, support, and build the capacity of parents and caregivers to support child development and early learning, and
- Support the development of healthy families through a variety of efforts, including the reduction of teen pregnancy.

Disparities

High-quality, early childhood education programs have been shown to help reduce disparities associated with poverty in early childhood. Studies indicate that it is possible to improve outcomes for vulnerable children, which can reduce achievement gaps; reduce the need for special education; increase the likelihood of healthier lifestyles; lower the crime rate; and reduce overall social costs. The Foundation prioritizes efforts that provide high-quality early childhood education and family supports to the most disadvantaged children and families.

Resources

The Mary Black Foundation relies on a number of internal and external resources to accomplish its work, including its professional staff, Board of Trustees, financial resources, and partnerships with grantees, partner organizations, and other funding partners.

Why Will These Strategies Work?

The Foundation has gathered a significant amount of early childhood education research that guides its work. The following studies, tools, and resources are among the data that informs the foundation's efforts:

- The Chicago Child-Parent Centers: A Longitudinal Study of Extended Early Childhood Intervention,
- Lifetime Effects: The High Scope Perry Preschool Study Through Age 40,
- The Carolina Abecedarian Project,
- Nurse Family Partnership - Randomized Controlled Trials,
- The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Early Childhood Data,
- Harvard University Center on the Developing Child,
- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study,
- Emerging Answers 2007.

Measuring Impact

It is critical that the Foundation continuously evaluate the effectiveness of its strategies and adjust and refine its approach as needed. Staff will use data, analysis, and consultations with partners and stakeholders to measure progress on specific indicators over time.