



## Prevent Crime: Early Childhood Education as a Crime Prevention Tool

Since the mid 1990s, the general revenue funds appropriated for the Department of Corrections has more than tripled, from about \$217 million (1994) to about \$670 million in 2009.<sup>1,2</sup> The ripple effects of crime are far reaching: loss of productivity for crime victims and their families, court fees, jail and prison expenses, personal and property damages, and the challenges faced by the children of the incarcerated. All of these carry a hefty monetary and societal price.

### Paying for Crime in the Missouri State System

A snapshot of the Missouri Department of Corrections (DOC) taken on Dec. 31, 2009 showed that Missouri state prisons housed 30,563 inmates,<sup>3</sup> which amounts to about \$489 million annually in taxpayer expenses, not including offenders under probation and parole supervision.

In 2008, 6.8% of the state's general fund, or \$575 million, was spent on corrections. In that year, one of every 36 Missouri adults was under the supervision of the DOC, whether in jail, prison or on probation or parole. This is an increase from one in every 97 adults in 1982.<sup>4</sup>

Depending on the DOC level of security, it can cost between \$43.17 and \$48.19 per day to house a state inmate (an average of \$45.09 per day), based on the cost of operating a prison, as well as daily needs of a prisoner.<sup>3</sup> This amounts to about \$16,000 per year per prisoner.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, a full-time student at the University of Missouri costs taxpayers about \$6,084 per year.<sup>6</sup>

### Getting ahead of Crime with Early Childhood Programs

Crime is clearly a problem that affects Missourians' quality of life and consumes state resources. When looking at crime-reduction strategies, few consider investing in early childhood (EC) education. However, researchers have studied high quality EC programs since the 1960s. The studies indicate that children who attended high quality EC programs as young children were *more likely* to graduate from high school and have higher lifetime earnings and *less likely* to participate in welfare assistance or criminal activity when compared to those who did not attend high quality EC programs as young children.

*... the most important impact [of attending an EC program] is the reduction in crime costs....the program repays \$12.90 for every \$1 invested. Almost all of these net benefits derive from reductions in crime by the male participants...*<sup>8</sup>

### Increasing High School Graduation Rates to Reduce Crime

One powerful tool to prevent crime is to support high quality EC education programs. Far beyond simply preparing children for kindergarten, EC programs set children on a positive developmental trajectory for academic success through the high school years. This has a positive impact on the high school graduation rate and the likelihood these children will become gainfully employed and productive citizens.

### The high cost of crime in Missouri

<b>\$16,000</b>	average cost per year of a Missouri inmate <sup>3</sup>
<b>30,563</b>	number of inmates in Missouri state prisons on Dec. 31, 2009 <sup>4</sup>
<b>\$489,008,000</b>	estimated annual cost of those 30,563 inmates
<b>\$664,563,452</b>	Missouri Department of Corrections FY2010 budget <sup>4</sup>

### In Missouri's state prisons<sup>7</sup>:

- 39.2% of the prison population does not have a high school diploma or a GED.
- 35% of inmates in a June 2009 snapshot were 24 years old or younger.
- 25.4% of inmates are classified as "Unskilled" or "No Skills or Training."
- 45% of inmates suffer from a mental health impairment or problem.

Criminal activity, which costs American society more than \$1.3 trillion per year in 2004 dollars, is higher among high school dropouts than high school graduates. Similarly, mothers who dropped out of school are much more likely to have children who commit crimes.<sup>10</sup> Researchers have calculated social savings from reductions in crime due to high school completion. Calculating victim, property and incarceration costs for violent and property crimes for one year, *a one percent increase in the male high school graduation rate and resulting decrease in crime could be associated with \$1.4 billion in benefits to society.*<sup>9</sup>

Researchers agree that the long-term and enduring benefits of high quality EC education programs include an increased rate of high school graduation and a decrease in the rate of criminal activity. Consider:

Measured in 2000 dollars, the crime of felony assault cost a victim \$26,860 and the criminal justice system \$19,319, bringing the cost to society for one felony assault to \$46,179.<sup>8</sup>

- When evaluated at age 27, participants in the High Scope/Perry Preschool Project (an EC program intervention) were found to have *half the average arrests rate* compared to non-participants (2.3 arrests compared to 4.6 arrests), much lower rates of arrest for drug making or dealing (7% compared to 25% ever arrested) and spent less than half the time on average in probation or on parole. Looking specifically at males, program participants averaged 3.8 lifetime arrests, compared to 6.1 lifetime arrests for non-participants.<sup>11</sup>
- The Chicago Child-Parent Centers study showed a reduction in crime participation for participants. Juvenile arrest rates for program participants through age 18 were 16.9, compared to 25.1 for the comparison group. Violent crime arrest rates for program participants were 9.0, contrasted with 15.3 for non-participants.<sup>12</sup> This study is significant because it involves a large cohort (intervention, n = 837 / comparison, n = 444) and the children attended public preschool programs.
- Each additional year of schooling reduces the probability that an individual will be incarcerated by 0.37 percentage points for black students. A full 23% of the differences in black and white incarceration rates are explained by the difference in education between those groups.<sup>10</sup>

## **Policy Recommendations**

**Invest in high quality early childhood education programs** for all young children in Missouri to prepare them for the best possible academic career and a crime-free adolescence and adulthood.

(Sara Semelka and Jacqueline Hawks, 2010)

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