

Preparing America's Children for Success in the 21st Century:

SO SMALL TO FAIL



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OVERVIEW

A joint initiative of Next Generation and the Bill, Hillary & Chelsea Clinton Foundation, *Too Small to Fail* aims to help parents, caregivers, educators, communities and businesses take specific, meaningful and evidence-based actions to improve the health and well-being of America's youngest children, ages zero to five, and prepare them to succeed in the 21st century. We will do this by undertaking:

- ✓ **a public action campaign aimed at parents and caregivers; and**
- ✓ **a campaign to secure private sector commitments aimed at business leaders**

Improving the health and well-being of America's youngest children isn't just the right thing to do—it's the economically smart thing to do. Our nation's future, and our ability to compete in an increasingly globalized economy, depends on it. Research conducted over the past few decades and across multiple disciplines has shown that early health and learning directly impacts an individual's long-term productivity and success, and our country's economic well-being. Other countries, including emerging economies like India and China, are making substantial investments in the learning, health and care of their youngest children.

Yet, in the United States, many children don't receive the basic nutrition they need in the earliest years of life. Many start kindergarten unprepared, lagging in critical skills from vocabulary acquisition and early numeracy to attention span and self-control. More and more grow up with chronic health conditions ranging from obesity to asthma to autism. This is no way to train the leaders, entrepreneurs and workers of tomorrow. What's worse, many parents don't realize that they can take specific actions in the first months and years of their child's life to insure their child's long-term success.

That's the bad news. But there is good news, too. Right now, more than at any moment in our history, we have the knowledge and tools to meet these challenges head-on. First, we know more than ever before about how early interactions and nutrition shape lifelong brain development, and we have proof that investments in health and well-being during a child's earliest years yield high social and economic returns. Second, new technologies and expanded access to existing tools make it easier to connect with parents and caregivers, provide them with useful information, and motivate them to act. Finally, there is a growing commitment and interest from government, business leaders, communities and parents to prioritize and support early childhood development.

Too Small to Fail is founded on the principle that it will take all of us together to prepare our youngest Americans for success in the 21st century. Government investment and policy changes are part of that equation, but not the whole solution. We believe that **small acts can have a big impact** on our kids. For example:

- Parents and caregivers can help improve a child's lifelong learning trajectory by talking more to their babies and toddlers, providing them with critical nutrients, and offering them stability and support in these earliest days and years.
- Businesses can provide parents with more predictable time with their children by making simple changes to workplace scheduling practices, educating their customers and employees about what they can do to improve the early years of a child's life, and breaking down market barriers to key nutrients and information parents need for their children.

This moment in time presents a tremendous opportunity to communicate to all Americans what child development experts have known for a long time: what we do for our kids *matters*—not just to them, but to all of us.

I. MEETING THE CHALLENGES: EARLY LEARNING, EARLY HEALTH & FAMILY SUPPORT

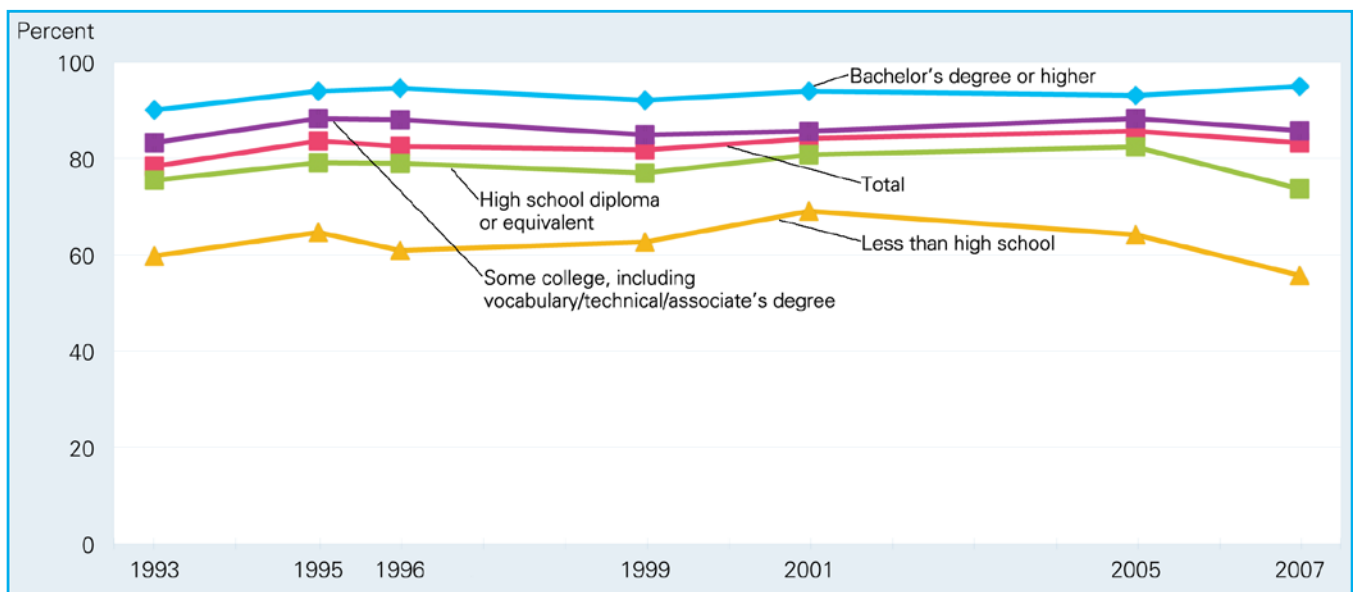
Too Small to Fail is focused on three major priorities for America’s kids, ages zero to five: (1) early learning; (2) early health and nutrition; and (3) family support.

A. Early Learning

While there is no single metric for early childhood preparedness and success,^{1,2} research has shown that some children enter school without the strong foundation they need to be successful.³ Of children born in 2001, when evaluated for early math and reading skills, overall health status and several behavioral measures, only 48 percent of poor children started school ready to learn, compared to 75 percent of children from middle-income families.⁴

Researchers have tracked school readiness of young children over time by looking at the availability of early education outside the home (e.g. access to preschool) and the frequency of pre-literacy activities at home (e.g. family reading in the home). On both metrics, there has been little improvement in the past twenty years. Approximately the same percentage of 3- to 6-year-olds (55 percent) were in preschool or center-based childcare in 2007 as there were in 1995.⁵ There are substantial gaps along economic, racial and education-based lines when it comes to the frequency of family reading in the home. And children of less educated parents are being read to with less frequency today than in 1993.⁶

Percentage of children ages 3–5 who were read to 3 or more times in the last week by a family member by mother’s education, selected years 1993–2007



Source: Department of Education. Available at <http://www.childstats.gov/americaschildren/edu1.asp>

In fact, there is a startling gap between highly educated parents and less educated parents in the amount of time that parents spend talking to, reading to and engaging in other activities with their young children that support cognitive development. Robert Putnam and Evrim Alintas call this “Goodnight Moon” time, and their forthcoming research indicates that while “Goodnight Moon” time

has increased for all families, it has increased most dramatically for those families with more highly educated parents.⁷ In the 1960s and 1970s, highly educated and less educated parents were spending similar amounts of time reading to their children; yet **in 2010-2012, the total gap between high- and low-educated mothers' and fathers' time spent on "Goodnight Moon" activities was more than half an hour daily.**⁸ This gap adds up over weeks, months and years to a significant gap in time investment in young children.

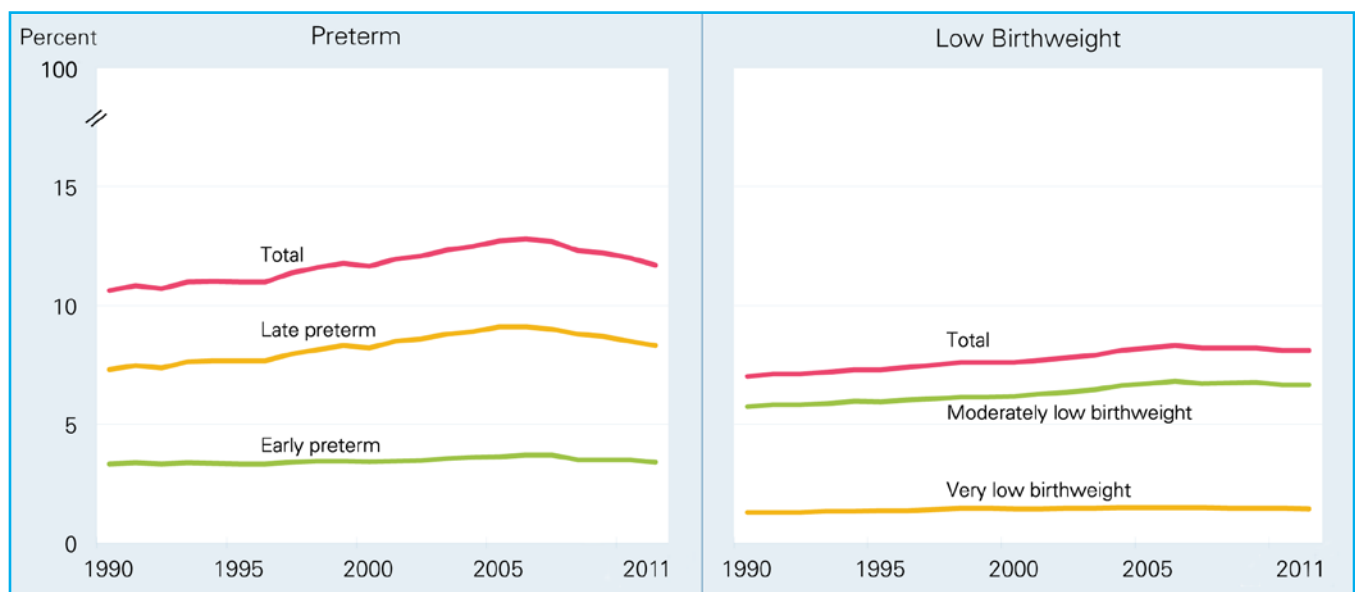
A key result of this gap is a troubling difference in children's early vocabularies. Researchers Betty Hart and Todd Risley found that by age four, children in professional families had heard an average of 30 million more words addressed to them than children in families on welfare, and 15 million more words than working-class families. This means that children from lower-income and even middle-class families often enter school with substantially smaller vocabularies than many of their peers.⁹

Unfortunately, inequities on display in preschool and kindergarten largely persist throughout life. Most of the high school achievement gap between poor, middle-income and wealthy students is already visible by kindergarten.¹⁰ And the children who have weak pre-literacy and numeracy skills in kindergarten are, on average, the same children with weak vocabulary and math skills in seventh grade.¹¹ Similar trends can be seen when it comes to life skills: discrepancies in attention span during preschool predict relative levels of academic persistence, earnings, and family stability, even 20 and 30 years later.¹² These lasting effects are no surprise: New brain research also shows how adverse childhood experiences linked to poverty can harm the development of the prefrontal cortex of the brain, which is associated with the ability to pay attention, exhibit self-control, organize and plan.¹³

B. Early Health and Nutrition

Many of America's youngest children are also deprived when it comes to early health and nutrition. In 2011, 8.1 percent of American babies were born with low birth weight, down slightly from 2006's record high of 8.3 percent but still far above the level of 7 percent recorded in 1990 and well above the average of 6.7 percent seen in the developed world.^{14,15}

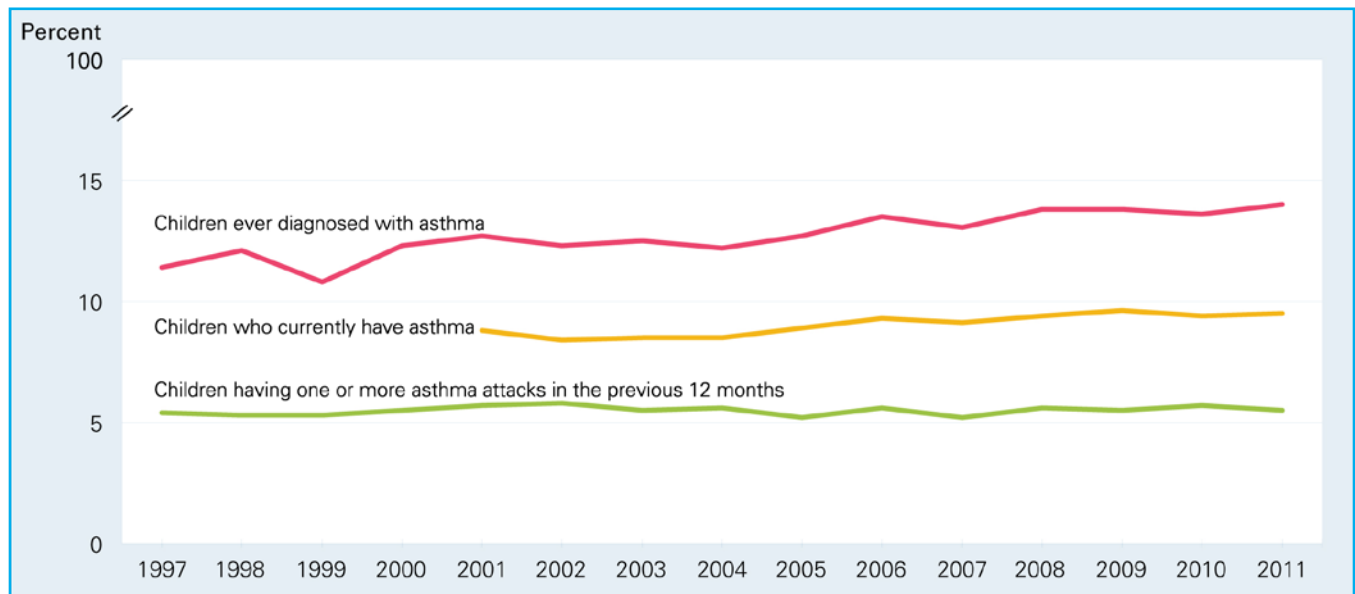
Percentage of infants born preterm and percentage of infants born with low birth weight, 1990–2011



Source: National Center for Health Statistics. Available at <http://childstats.gov/americaschildren/health1.asp>

Chronic health conditions in childhood are also on the rise. Despite encouraging recent data suggesting a slight downturn in early childhood obesity, more than one-quarter of America’s children between the ages of 2 and 5 are overweight. Overall, nearly one in eight children are obese (up from just one in 20 children in the late 1970s).¹⁶ Asthma incidence, too, has risen substantially in the recent past. While the measures are not perfectly comparable, data collected by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) suggests that the prevalence of asthma in children has more than doubled since 1980.¹⁷ And overall, the prevalence of chronic health conditions in children—which includes obesity, asthma, other physical conditions, as well as behavior and learning problems—has more than doubled from 12.8 percent in 1994 to 26.6 percent in 2006.¹⁸

Percentage of children ages 0–17 with asthma, 1997–2011



Source: Department of Education. Available at <http://www.childstats.gov/americaschildren/edu1.asp>

Just as early learning is linked to later life achievement, early health challenges can contribute to later health problems. For example, low birth weight has been linked to asthma, low IQ and hypertension.^{19,20} Exposure to tobacco in utero or during early childhood is associated with respiratory diseases in childhood and lung disease in adulthood.²¹ Failure to get enough sleep early in a child’s life can lead to disruptive behavior, diminished cognitive performance and greater risk for unintentional injuries, and it is also associated with obesity in later childhood and early adulthood.²² And poor nutrition is associated with increased risk of developmental delays, obesity and potentially low birth weight babies—all of which can have significant consequences on healthy development.²³ On the flip side, we know that good health and nutrition during pregnancy and early in a child’s life, including feeding babies breast milk, can reduce the risk of chronic health conditions such as obesity, diabetes, asthma and possibly even autism.²⁴

C. Family Support

America’s changing family structure, coupled with increasing work burdens felt by both single parents and dual-worker couples, present additional challenges for America’s children.

In recent years, our family structure has changed, with an increasing number of children raised in single-parent or dual-working parent families. This means that parents are finding less and less time to spend with their children. In 2012, less than two-thirds of American children under six years old lived

with their married parents, compared to more than three-quarters of young children who lived with their married parents in 1992, due largely to the continued increase of children living with single parents.²⁵ Nearly two-thirds of single mothers are working in low-wage retail, service or administrative jobs that offer little flexibility, benefits or economic support, making it harder for them to support or spend time with their children.²⁶

And it is not just single parents who struggle with the demands of work and family. Recent surveys have shown that families in the United States are experiencing deeper work-family conflicts than families in other developed countries—a result, in part, of Americans’ longer work days and lack of access to family-friendly workplace policies.²⁷ Nearly half of U.S. parents report that they spend too little time with their youngest or only child,²⁸ both mothers and fathers report high levels of work-family conflict,²⁹ and 75 percent of U.S. employees report that they do not have enough time with their children.³⁰

Just as with early learning and early health, the science is clear: these challenging trends have long-term impacts on our children’s ability to succeed. Research shows that exposure to poverty and family instability that is sustained and severe can cause toxic levels of stress in children, resulting in a bodily response that damages brain development.³¹ Research also shows that young children who experience high levels of toxic stress at home often experience greater challenges in school, struggle forming healthy families as adults and have poorer long-term health outcomes.³² In contrast, love, care and attention from parents and other caregivers—combined with stability at home—helps the young body respond positively to difficult situations, strengthens brain development and increases the chance that children will finish school and lead successful lives.³³ Without adequate time to spend with children, parents cannot have the quality interactions that promote vocabulary development and other early learning crucial to lifelong success.

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This survey of recent research illustrates the very serious challenges our children face. It also makes a strong, scientific case that what we do today to improve early learning, early health and family support can meaningfully affect whether our children are prepared to succeed tomorrow. Parents and caregivers are their children’s first teachers. By informing and empowering parents, caregivers, community and business leaders, we can work together to inspire concrete actions that will significantly change outcomes for America’s children.

Preparing our youngest generation to succeed in the 21st century is a moral imperative and part of the basic intergenerational social compact, but it also makes good economic sense. Today’s kids will be America’s future workforce at a time of growing global competition. As detailed in a 2012 report from Next Generation and the Center for American Progress entitled *The Competition that Really Matters*, India and China are making dramatic investments in their youngest citizens. China, for example, has made such substantial investments in early childhood education that the country is on track to have more college graduates in 2030 than the total size of the United States’ workforce. America, meanwhile, risks falling behind.³⁴ While we know that global competitive pressures on the American economy will continue to increase, we’re not making strategic investments in our youngest children to ensure a strong and robust future workforce that can meet the challenges of a more competitive global economy. Only through a strong, shared investment in our next generation from communities, businesses, governments and individuals can we ensure that the United States continues to lead.

Despite encouraging programs, endeavors and investments over the past few decades as well as some substantial victories, it is clear that more action is needed. Recent research highlights that our efforts to prepare our kids for lifelong success have not improved or have even worsened over the past twenty years. Additionally, as the country's demographics have shifted—now with half of all children under 5 in America from ethnic and racial minorities—troubling and persistent race-, ethnicity- and family-structure-based gaps in education, income and health have emerged. Improved efforts and investments in early childhood will be necessary to prevent more dramatic declines and begin closing these gaps.

The growing share of children born with disadvantaged backgrounds only reinforces the need to expand high-quality early learning opportunities for all children, promote early health and ensure all parents have the support they need to spend time with their kids in the crucial early years. But particularly in this challenging political environment and time of fiscal stress, if we really want to help our kids and our country, we must act now as individuals, as parents, as caregivers, as community leaders, and as business leaders to support our youngest children. That is why *Too Small to Fail* will identify and facilitate specific evidence-based actions to improve the lives of our next generation.

Too Small to Fail: Building on the Efforts of Many

Too Small to Fail is not the first initiative created to meet these challenges. Helping to prepare children for success by focusing on early learning, early health and family support, often framed as universal school readiness, was central to the work of two national efforts in recent decades: the National Education Goals Panel and the National Commission on Children. *Too Small to Fail* is committed to building on those efforts—and collaborating with the many other initiatives currently underway—just as we are committed to seeking out new ideas, new research, new technologies and new partners that will maximize the likelihood that all of our children benefit.

Over the past two decades, there have also been numerous public commitments to early childhood development: the enactment of the Family and Medical Leave Act, the establishment of the Children's Health Insurance Program, the first White House Conferences on Early Childhood Development and Child Care, the establishment of Early Head Start, a renewed focus on strengthening Head Start and child care, an investment in federal research funds to explore effective early literacy strategies, the establishment of the Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program, the Early Learning Challenge, and, most recently, President Obama's call for universal access to preschool and increased investments in early childhood programs for children ages zero to five.

Similarly, states and communities have launched efforts to expand early childhood services, better coordinate programs, improve quality and bring renewed attention to young children. And the philanthropic community has made equally impressive commitments. For example, philanthropy has supported early learning centers such as the Educare model;³⁵ robust early childhood data tracking and reporting efforts such as KIDS COUNT;³⁶ results-based financing such as the partnership between Goldman Sachs, United Way of Salt Lake, and the Early Childhood Innovation Accelerator to create the first social impact bond to finance early childhood education;³⁷ and more inclusive, family-centered interventions such as the Two-Generation Approach for parents and children.³⁸

II. RECOGNIZING THE PROMISE OF OUR TIMES: EMERGING SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

While progress over the past twenty years has been limited when it comes to the health and well-being of our youngest kids, it has been substantial when it comes to scientific research on early childhood brain development and health outcomes. And, of course, we now have digital technology that enables us to reach millions of people, including parents, caregivers and teachers, in ways we couldn't have imagined two decades ago. *Too Small to Fail* aims to harness these advancements in the service of improving the lives of our kids. As *Too Small to Fail* develops, science and technology will be central to our efforts.

A. An Important Basis in Science

The year 2000, when the National Academy of Sciences published the landmark report *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*, marked a critical moment in the integration and understanding of the science of early childhood development. The report's analysis was clear: "From the time of conception to the first day of kindergarten, development proceeds at a pace exceeding that of any subsequent state of life."³⁹

Since that publication, ongoing work from experts has further deepened the scientific understanding of child development and confirmed this core principle. For example, the recently re-launched Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Commission to Build a Healthier America noted that interventions that promote early childhood development and support children and families had the strongest evidence of lasting effects on quality of health and life.⁴⁰ Similarly, research cited earlier in this paper supports this proposition and makes clear the scientific links between a child's early care and his or her ability to succeed in the future. As a result, parents and caregivers play a particularly crucial role in ensuring that children have the kinds of positive experiences in their earliest years that can set them on a track for lifelong success.

B. The Powerful Reach of Technology

Advances in technology—new products and platforms as well as vastly expanded access to existing technologies, like the Internet and mobile phones—have created new ways to share information with parents and caregivers, build communities, and motivate action. *Too Small to Fail* will use technology to communicate directly with parents and caregivers, help them understand that they have an essential role in early brain development, and provide them with information and tools to take action.

We will also help parents and caregivers navigate the digital world once their preschool-age children begin to explore technology. It is important to note that this is different from recommending that parents and caregivers use technology with children in their earliest years. During that time, parents and caregivers can best help their children by putting their technology down to provide the interactions and nurturing that young children need most—the American Academy of Pediatrics, for example, recommends that "television and other entertainment media should be avoided for infants and children under age 2."⁴¹ As children get older, however, high-quality, evidence-based technology tools can potentially support parent-child interactions that promote learning and other positive outcomes.

Too Small to Fail is committed to leveraging new platforms to mobilize parents and caregivers to make a difference in the lives of children. Today, more and more Americans are using social media to connect with each other, share information and learn. According to research conducted in late 2012, over two-thirds of American Internet users use Facebook, including 83 percent of individuals between the ages of 18 and 29. Facebook and other social networks offer innovative ways to reach millions of people,⁴² and public engagement campaigns are exploring the opportunities these platforms present to share their messages. In May 2012, for example, Facebook enabled an option that allowed people to note their status as organ donors on their profiles, published changes to that option in update streams, and offered links to educational information and online signup forms for organ donation to people who were interested. On the day the feature launched, researchers found that about 21 times as many people as usual signed up online to be organ donors.⁴³

Of course, social media is not the only advance in technology that has expanded the ways public education campaigns work to engage people. Near-universal use of cell phones, particularly among young people, has significantly changed the landscape.⁴⁴ For example, Text4Baby (available in English and Spanish), provides registered users with three action-oriented text messages per week, from the early stages of a woman's pregnancy to the child's first birthday. These text messages—which are completely free to receive via nearly any parent's mobile phone—offer tips on issues such as safe sleep, immunization, nutrition and exercise, as well as information about maternal health and supports. Early evidence shows that Text4Baby is already helping parents and children—one evaluation found that mothers using Text4Baby were substantially less likely to miss important doctor's appointments, while another participant survey found that two-thirds of subscribers had conversations with a doctor about information contained in a Text4Baby message.⁴⁵

When combined with social media promotion, text message-based campaigns have had powerful effects. In the aftermath of the devastating 2010 Haiti earthquake, for example, social media helped provide a valuable organizing point for information-sharing and action—in less than three days after the earthquake, the Red Cross raised \$8 million for relief efforts via a text message donation program popularized through social media and supported by the State Department.⁴⁶ Secretary Clinton also launched an effort called Mobile Alliance for Maternal Action (MAMA) to get health messages directly into the hands of new mothers in the developing world, which is now reaching women in 40 countries.⁴⁷

Finally, cutting edge research in decision science and behavioral economics means we have a deeper understanding of why people do, or do not, take action. We now know more about the importance of reminders, default settings, framing and choice overload on individuals' decision-making, and recent research has provided insight on how scarcity, in all its forms, effects critical personal behavior. For example, studies have confirmed that people who face resource or time scarcity—through job loss, food insecurity, or poverty—are less able to plan for the future, given the sheer number of acute problems crowding their cognitive space.⁴⁸ Streamlining decision-making processes can help parents make better choices. Indeed, we will use this knowledge to inform our approach to a public action campaign.

III. SEIZING THE OPPORTUNITY: WHAT WE CAN DO NOW

At *Too Small to Fail*, we are motivated by the evidence, not discouraged by it. We believe that if we take the scientific research seriously, and apply a thoughtful approach, we can identify manageable, evidence-based actions that will improve kids' lives. We also believe that an effort aimed at supporting and promoting concrete actions by parents, caregivers, and early childhood educators, as well as business leaders, can benefit our kids today and catalyze a shift in cultural and social norms that will support needed public investment in the future. Accordingly, we will focus our work on two main activities: (1) a public action campaign targeted at parents and caregivers; and (2) a campaign to secure private sector commitments targeted at business leaders.

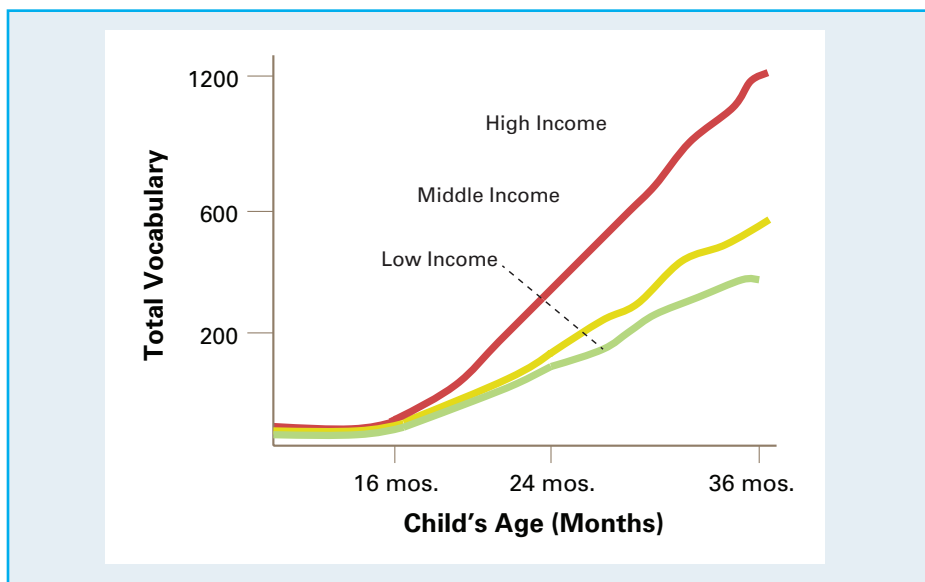
A. Public Action Campaign Aimed at Parents and Caregivers

We are building a public action campaign that will span the areas of early learning, early health and family support. Our immediate efforts will focus on a serious obstacle in early learning—specifically, **the vocabulary gap**, which we see as a critical but not intractable challenge.

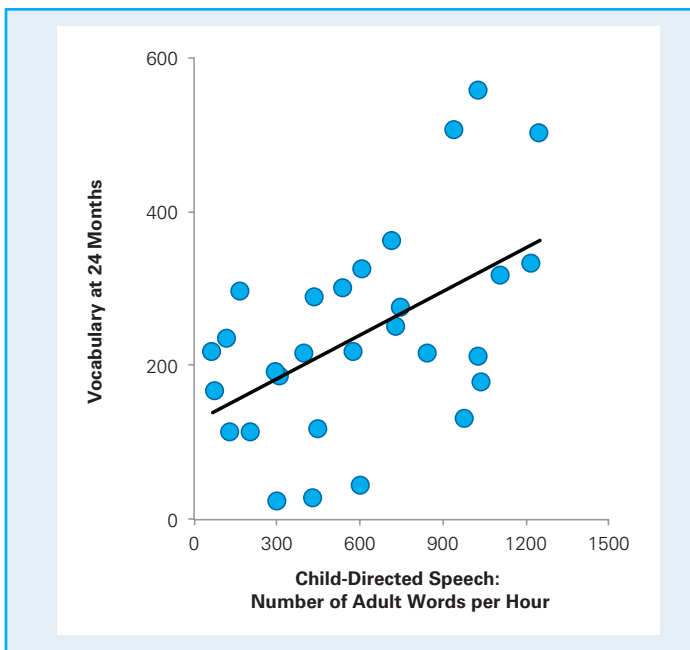
The two factors that most explain the income-related gaps in school readiness are parenting styles and home learning environments.⁵⁰ This means that if we can better equip parents with the knowledge and tools to succeed as their children's first teachers, and mobilize them to act on that knowledge and use those tools, we could see a significant decline in the school readiness gap.

As noted previously, research shows that very poor children typically hear 30 million fewer words addressed to them by age 4 than higher-income children. This gap in hearing words translates directly into a gap in acquiring words. Typically, an average child from a low-income family has acquired 500 words by the age of 3, compared to 700 words for a child from a working-class family and 1,100 for a child from a professional family.⁵¹ And the research is clear that it isn't about hearing words from adult conversations or from a television that is turned on. A child's ability to acquire vocabulary is directly tied to parents and

The Word Gap Between Children From High-, Middle- and Low-Income Families



Source: Hart & Risley (1995)



Source: Weisleder, A. & Fernald, A. (2013). Talking to children matters: Early language experience strengthens processing and builds vocabulary. *Psychological Science*, DOI: 10.1177/0956797613488145

caregivers talking directly to and interacting with their infants and toddlers.⁵² As Dr. Dana Suskind from the Thirty Million Words campaign describes it, to help children acquire vocabulary, parents need to “tune in, talk more and take turns.”⁵⁶

This early gap explains most of the vocabulary gap in seventh grade,⁵⁴ which impacts a child’s ability to succeed in the future. In other words, a vocabulary gap already evident at age 4 can influence a child’s chances to succeed at age 14, 24, 34 and so on. This fact may shock many parents and other members of the public because the existence and impact of a “vocabulary gap” has never been purposefully communicated to the general public and thus is not well understood.

When a child is deprived of food, there is public outrage. And this is because child hunger is correctly identified as a moral and economic issue that moves people to action. We believe that the poverty of vocabulary should be discussed with the same passion as child hunger. Such a discussion stands to inspire a call to action, commanding the attention of parents and caregivers, and empowering them to provide their kids a stronger start in life.

Why Knowledge Matters: Low-income parents and caregivers face many structural barriers to engaging more with their children, beginning with a lack of free time. But the evidence also suggests that they may speak to their children less in part because they do not fully realize how deeply their own actions can impact their children’s lives. In fact, more than income or education, knowledge about child development seems to predict the frequency and quality of a mother’s communication with her child.⁵⁵ Low-income mothers may underestimate by as much as 50 percent the impact that they can have on their children’s cognitive development. This is in marked contrast with high-income parents, who on average appear to accurately understand the benefits of parental investment in children.⁵⁶ All parents want what’s best for their children. Because it appears that parents who understand the value of investing their time in their children are likely to invest more of it, simply

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empowering low-income parents with this information could improve outcomes for children by 10 percent or more by age 2.⁵⁷

Learning from Previous Campaigns: There is clear evidence that public education and engagement campaigns have helped to change behavior and improve public health for children and adults.⁵⁸ Nearly everyone over a certain age can remember the effective campaigns focused on smoking cessation during pregnancy,⁵⁹ improved road safety through the use of seat belts and designated drivers,⁶⁰ and avoiding sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) by putting babies “back to sleep.”⁶¹ Recent small but significant declines in obesity rates among low-income preschoolers in some states may also provide evidence of the potential impact of public information campaigns.⁶²

We recognize that the most successful campaigns have focused on specific actions, such as putting babies to sleep on their backs, or vaccinating babies at well-baby check-ups every six months. We also know that low-income parents face many challenges in their everyday lives that may make them less responsive to information campaigns.⁶³ Yet the research shows that even deeply embedded behavior—such as parents’ interactions with children based on family experience and long-held beliefs—can be modified over time if concrete, simple actions are introduced in ways that respect parents; if there are multiple avenues of getting information to parents; and if there is a long-term investment in the campaign, including in evaluating its impact and adjusting its methods when needed.⁶⁴ Recognizing all of these facts, we will deploy traditional, digital and social media, and support tailored actions to ensure we engage with parents in the ways most effective for their individual circumstances, starting with our work to reduce the vocabulary gap.

Partnering With Communities and Launching a Prize Competition: A core element of *Too Small to Fail*’s public action campaign will be actively supporting and collaborating with communities as well as the organizations dedicated to serving them. *Too Small to Fail* will aim to ensure that our public action effort has a real impact at the local level by providing tangible tools to help communities and community organizations take action. We will also seek to raise the profile of promising local efforts that can be replicated in other communities or nationally.

We anticipate creating a series of prizes for technology tools that help preschool-age children achieve critical learning gains.

To foster and strengthen public engagement, we will run a prize competition. We anticipate creating a series of prizes for technology tools that help preschool-age children achieve critical learning gains. These gains could be in academic areas such as vocabulary, literacy and math; in important underlying skills, such as attention span and self-control; or in areas outside learning altogether, such as health and fitness. We will define aggressive but achievable “reach goals” for what such tools could achieve, if they are developed with creativity and focus on outcomes.

While there is already a rapidly growing market in technology geared to preschool children, it is falling short in two key respects:

- *Most Tools Are Not Supported by Research:* High-quality research focused on educational or health outcomes is costly, and by definition, its results are uncertain. Most companies have chosen to invest less in such research and more in product development. This fact goes a long way toward explaining the wide array of attractive, clever and unproven materials currently available to parents.
- *Lack of Objective Guidance for Parents:* Even where helpful and effective material exists, it is difficult to identify. Parenting and technology websites and magazines often provide a great deal

of useful information and perspective through reviews. By necessity, however, these publications cannot reflect the intensive research that could help parents make the best decisions for their children. User reviews and word of mouth can likewise provide helpful perspective, but they do not substitute for the evidence that rigorous evaluations could provide.

Recent years have seen an explosion in the use of prizes and challenges to spur innovation—particularly in cases where there is a clearly defined goal and a range of potential innovators who are willing to take risks.⁶⁵ Those conditions hold here: We know what our children need to learn. We see a range of players already operating in this space, yet there is no existing incentive to go the extra mile in demonstrating impacts. We believe we can help create such an incentive.

B. A Campaign to Secure Private Sector Commitments, Targeted at Business Leaders

Recognizing that providing information and tools is not enough for the many parents who face structural barriers to improving opportunities for their children—from lack of affordable child care to the inability to control work schedules to lack of access to basic nutrients needed in the prenatal and early years—the second major element of *Too Small to Fail* will call on the private sector to help break down these barriers.

Modeled on the Bill, Hillary & Chelsea Clinton Foundation’s work in securing private sector commitments to action, *Too Small to Fail* will encourage businesses to make specific commitments, such as reforming internal employee policies to better support the working parents of young children, changing market policies to provide greater access to needed products, or forming partnerships with communities that want to take action. These private sector actions will support families and individuals as they work to build a brighter future for our youngest generation.

We hope early commitments will inspire additional businesses to take similar actions, both through public recognition of commitments and by providing potentially replicable models. Like the public action campaign, the effort to secure business commitments will be driven by scientific evidence that shows what families need to support children in the early years.

Examples of business commitments could include:

- *Improving Workplace Policies:* As described above, many families of young children feel high levels of stress and work-family conflict, which negatively impacts the development of young children. *Too Small to Fail* will encourage businesses to voluntarily provide more family-friendly policies and will support those who make a commitment to do so. A large body of literature suggests these measures are both pro-child, because greater flexibility means less stress for parents and more time for positive interactions with young children building vocabulary and other critical skills, and pro-business because flexibility improves retention and productivity.⁶⁶ We would work to document business benefits that stem from increases in employees’ time spent with young children.
- *Breaking Down Barriers to Technology Access:* Early, but promising, survey research indicates that digital tools and social media can be an important source of information and support for parents and caregivers of very young children.⁶⁷ For example, Text4Baby, discussed in more depth earlier

These private sector actions will support families and individuals as they work to build a brighter future for our youngest generation.

in this document, provides free, frequent and age-appropriate information to parents of babies via text message and has reached over half a million people since its launch in 2010.⁶⁸ As our economy becomes increasingly reliant on digital skills, other age-appropriate digital tools may also help play a role in guiding parents and preparing our children for success in the 21st century. *Too Small to Fail* will work with technology companies, communication and media companies, as well as retailers, to increase access to information that can support early learning and early health.

- *Improving Access to Key Nutrients and Vitamins:* Poor nutrition during pregnancy is associated with increased risk of developmental delays, obesity and potentially low-birth-weight babies—all of which can have significant consequences on healthy development.⁶⁹ And we know that specific nutritional supplements (particularly when combined with a baseline of good maternal nutrition) can have a big impact—folic acid, for example, can reduce the incidence of spina bifida in children, and promising new research shows that appropriate levels of folic acid may also reduce rates of autism.⁷⁰ *Too Small to Fail* will work to identify barriers to access that may prevent pregnant women and young children from getting the nutrition they need, including informational and cost barriers, and we will encourage employers, insurance providers and retailers to work with us to provide greater access to certain products through deep discounts or simply through promotion and awareness.

The work of the Bill, Hillary & Chelsea Clinton Foundation demonstrates the capacity of private sector engagement to drive positive change for America’s youngest generation. Since its inception, the Clinton Foundation has built innovative partnerships between businesses, governments, NGOs and individuals to strengthen health systems, fight climate change, expand economic opportunity and help individuals lead healthier lives. Clinton Foundation-driven private sector efforts have ranged from Walmart’s pledge to reduce packaging materials by 5 percent, estimated to reduce 700,000 metric tons of carbon emissions;⁷¹ to a coalition of leading beverage manufacturers voluntarily agreeing to replace full-calorie soft drinks in schools with more nutritious, smaller-portioned beverages, reducing the total beverage calories shipped to schools by 90 percent;⁷² to leading generic drug manufacturers agreeing to lower the cost of lifesaving medicines and diagnostics for HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis, reducing prices between 80 and 90 percent and saving countless lives and improving health in the developing world. *Too Small to Fail* will seek to build on the experience and lessons learned from this model as it encourages and supports specific business commitments that will improve early learning, early health and family support.

CONCLUSION

In this roadmap document, we have aimed to set forth the considerable challenges facing children and families today and the considerable opportunity before us now to meet those challenges head-on. We have described how *Too Small to Fail*, Next Generation and the Bill, Hillary & Chelsea Clinton Foundation plan to seize this opportunity and engage individuals, communities and businesses to take action. We want to do this because our kids—and our country—deserve better than they are getting right now. And we’re engaged in this effort because we recognize that our shared commitment to America’s children today will determine the strength of our nation’s future. We hope you will join us as we undertake this challenging but vital endeavor for our children, on whom we rely to shape our world for generations to come.

ENDNOTES

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