

Why does it matter?

Question: Why does it matter if five-year-olds are ready for school when they've got 12 years of schooling ahead in any case?

Answer: Every year of life brings new learning opportunities and increased expectations that build on each other. For example, the building blocks of good communication skills begin as babies: a baby babbles, and if you respond, the baby grows into a one-year-old who is able to learn words. At 18 months the toddler should be using words to ask for things, and by three the child should talk well enough to be understood by strangers and carry on a conversation. And so it goes on.

If a child hasn't learned the basics of communication, thinking and problem solving, social competence, emotional maturity or physical development before they get to school, then they will struggle in the classroom, and won't be readily able to absorb the school curriculum. For some children this struggle to learn will build up year after year, leaving them further behind their peers. Some will not graduate from high school, and those that do may not have the grades to help them move on to post-secondary learning. This will further affect their job choices and whether they are able to make sufficient income to sustain themselves.

Having learning difficulties can also have a lifelong effect on one's confidence, self-esteem and emotional wellbeing. In summary, the compounded effect of having difficulty learning has significant impact not only on the individual, but also the family and community.

At United Way we invest in early childhood education because we know it has widespread, long-lasting benefits for the child, his or her family and the economy as a whole. That's why it matters.