



Save the Children's early learning and early childhood development programs reach children worldwide, from Juyel in Bangladesh, to these preschoolers in Mozambique, to Latiya and her son Joseph in the United States. Save the Children photos by Susan Warner, left, and Joshua Roberts, lower right. Photo upper right courtesy of GMB Akash/Panos Pictures

Save the Children and Children's Early Learning: Our International and U.S. Qualifications, Programs and Leadership

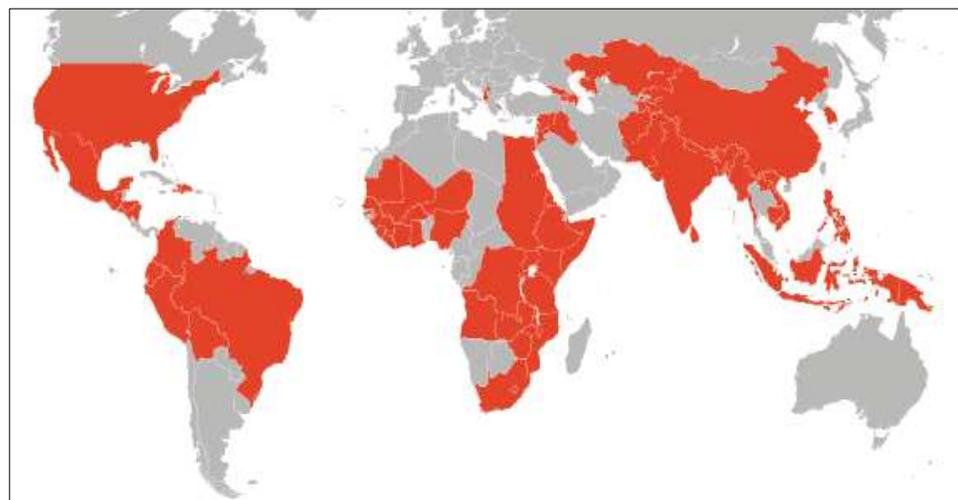
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Save the Children invests in childhood—every day, in times of crisis and for our future. In the U.S. and around the world, we are dedicated to ensuring every child has the best chance for success. Our pioneering programs give children a healthy start, the opportunity to learn and protection from harm. Our advocacy efforts provide a voice for children who cannot speak for themselves. As the leading expert on children, we inspire and achieve lasting impact for millions of the world's most vulnerable girls and boys. By transforming children's lives now, we change the course of their future and ours.

This qualifications document details Save the Children's U.S. and global investment in children's early learning. Our work is driven by incontrovertible evidence that the earlier we reach children the better and that parents who stimulate their children's early development vastly increase their chances of success in school.

For over 20 years, Save the Children has delivered early childhood development (ECD) programs. Over time, we have sought to build a rigorous evidence base to achieve regional and global scale. Through our advocacy efforts, we have influenced numerous global- and national-level policies that benefit young children and their families. Our current ECD program portfolio covers 75 countries (see graphic at right), including the U.S., and reaches more than 2.1 million vulnerable children ages 0-8 each year in their homes, in child care centers, in schools and in other community spaces. By 2030, our goal is to ensure that *all* children receive good quality early childhood development interventions with increased investment by governments and communities.



We are seeking partnerships with corporations and private foundations who recognize the profound and life-long advantages that we can provide to children when we reach them early—and who share our ambition to ensure that all children have access to quality early learning opportunities.

PART I: MAKING THE CASE FOR CHILDREN'S EARLY LEARNING

Early childhood development (ECD) programs ensure that young children survive, thrive and reach their full potential by building intellectual curiosity and cognitive skills, encouraging socio-emotional competences, and ensuring physical health and well-being among young children. Children served in early development programs are more likely to enroll in school, complete school on time, plan their families, have higher household incomes, become productive adults, and educate their own children, than children who never have access to these programs. And, they are less likely to repeat a grade, drop out of school or engage in high-risk behaviors such as smoking, risky sexual behavior, substance abuse and addiction, and criminal and violent activity.

Given widespread recognition of these benefits, host governments, NGOs and the private sector have all played a role in growing enrollment in pre-primary education programs, such that the global pre-primary education gross enrolment ratio increased from 33 percent in 1999 to 50 percent in 2011.¹ Over that period, the number of children enrolled in ECD programs grew by almost 60 million² For millions of children, however, the reality is that they will begin their lives and grow up never having had the advantages that early learning offers. One in five children in the poorest countries still does not have access to preschool. As a result, more than 200 million children under age 5—more than 30 percent of the world’s children—fail to reach their potential in cognitive development because of poverty, lack of early stimulation and poor health and nutrition, limiting their future ability to succeed in school, obtain gainful employment and contribute to their communities.³

Consider that in developing countries:

- Although 19 out of 20 children are expected to survive their first year of life⁴, only about half of these children will reach their developmental potential due in part to the lack of opportunities for early learning.
- Universal participation in primary school is likely to remain elusive in many countries by 2015. It is projected that 12 percent of countries will still have fewer than 8 in 10 children enrolled, including two-thirds of countries in sub-Saharan Africa.⁵
- Low literacy rates among parents in poor rural communities affect children’s early language development and educational aspirations. In addition, children living in poverty experience less cognitive stimulation and enrichment than their middle-income peers.⁶

While in the U.S.:

- There is a lack of high-quality early childhood and supplemental educational services in many rural areas. Children living in poverty and with little to no access to early education are already 18 months behind developmentally by age 4; by grade 4, children not at grade level are unlikely to catch up.⁷
- According to a federal government survey of children’s health, 60 percent of American children from families with incomes at least 400 percent of the federal poverty threshold—\$95,400 for a family of four—are read to daily from birth to age 5, compared with around a third of children from families living below the poverty line, \$23,850 for a family of four.⁸
- Disadvantaged children who don’t participate in high-quality early education programs (ages 3-5) are: 70 percent more likely to be arrested for a violent crime; 60 percent more likely to never attend college; and 25 percent more likely to drop out of school.⁹

¹ Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2013/14

² Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2013/14

³ Engle, P. L., Black, M. M., Behrman, J. R., Meena Cabral, d. M., & al, e. (2007). Child development in developing countries 3: Strategies to avoid the loss of developmental potential in more than 200 million children in the developing world. *The Lancet*, 369(9557), 229-42.

⁴ UNICEF. (2009). *The State of the World’s Children Special Edition: Celebrating 20 Years of the Convention on the Rights of the Child*. New York: UNICEF.

⁵ Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2013/14

⁶ Rural Matters Report 11/12

⁷ National Center for Child Poverty, 2007; Kids Count Data Center, 2011

⁸ 2011-2012 National Survey of Children’s Health: <http://www.npr.org/blogs/health/2014/06/24/325177669/never-too-young-pediatricians-say-parents-should-read-to-infants>

⁹ Building a Grad Nation, 2012 (America’s Promise Alliance)

What We Know

1. Oral Language Matters

The early experiences of babies and toddlers with language have a considerable impact on their future reading development. Oral language skills develop in the context of responsive environments and consistent language interactions between children and caregivers. The sheer quantity of parental talk is highly associated with vocabulary size in the early years.¹⁰ Globally, by age 3, children of wealthier parents have vocabularies two to three times larger than their more disadvantaged peers. Even more astounding is the long lasting and cumulative impact of these early disparities: language development before age 3 predicted differences in vocabulary size and reading comprehension scores at age 9, even after controlling for other factors.¹¹

By age 3, U.S. children living in poverty hear an average of 30 million fewer words addressed to them than children from more affluent, professional families. Even children from working-class families may hear 15 million fewer words than children from wealthier families.¹² This word deficit illustrates why children in need start school 18 months developmentally behind, struggle to catch up (many never do) and have reduced opportunities in school and later in life.

2. Start Reading - the Sooner the Better

Early exposure to print and books is critical for reading success and frames lifelong attitudes about reading. While access to books and print is critical, the process of reading to and with children is even more important for building the knowledge required for eventual reading success.¹³ ¹⁴ If reading begins in the early years, long before children enter Grade 1 or kindergarten, children are far more likely to become skilled readers. Even more important, literacy-rich home environments, in which parents engage in reading and share books with children, can override some of the educational disadvantages that lower-income families often face.¹⁵ ¹⁶

The American Academy of Pediatrics is among the most recent groups to have endorsed early learning and literacy. In the summer of 2014 the group, which represents 62,000 pediatricians across the country, asked its members to become powerful advocates for reading aloud. Pediatricians are being encouraged to tell parents to read aloud to their infants from birth to help enhance vocabulary and other communication skills. This is the first time the AAP—which has issued recommendations on how long mothers should nurse their babies and advises parents to keep children away from televisions until they are at least 2—has taken a position on early literacy.

¹⁰ Hart, B., & Risley, T. R. (1995). *Meaningful differences in the everyday experience of young American children*. Paul H Brookes Publishing.

¹¹ Hart, B., & Risley, T. R. (1995). *Meaningful differences in the everyday experience of young American children*. Paul H Brookes Publishing.

¹² Betty Hart and Todd R. Risley, "The Early Catastrophe: The 30 Million Word Gap by Age 3" Spring 2003. Available at <http://www.aft.org/pdfs/americaneducator/spring2003/TheEarlyCatastrophe.pdf>

¹³ Hargrave, A. C., & Sénéchal, M. (2000). A book reading intervention with preschool children who have limited vocabularies: The benefits of regular reading and dialogic reading. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 15(1), 75-90.

¹⁴ Anderson, R. C., Hiebert, E. H., Scott, J. A., & Wilkinson, I. AG (1985). *Becoming a nation of readers: the report of the commission on reading*.

¹⁵ Purcell-Gates, V. (1996). Stories, coupons, and the TV Guide: Relationships between home literacy experiences and emergent literacy knowledge. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 31(4), 406-428.

¹⁶ Sénéchal, M., LeFevre, J., Hudson, E., & Lawson, P. (1996). Knowledge of storybooks as a predictor of young children's vocabulary. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 88, 520-536.

3. Preschools and Early Learning Programs Can Make a Difference

Research has demonstrated that children who attend quality early childhood programs and start out with optimal literacy foundational skills tend to thrive and grow academically, while students with fewer opportunities for early learning tend to get left behind.^{17 18} Oral language, phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge and print awareness are all strong predictors of how quickly and how well children will read once they are exposed to formal reading instruction in Grades 1, 2 or 3.^{19 20} These skills are best supported in the context of quality preschool programs, which also make the crucial link to children's home. For example, a 5-year longitudinal study looking at children's reading achievement demonstrated that emergent literacy skills at the end of preschool directly predicted word reading at the end of grade 1, which in turn predicted reading in grade 3.²¹

4. Caregivers Matter

Children living in households where an adult can read, particularly the mother, enter school better prepared, perform better on reading assessments, tend to stay in school longer and have a higher level of school achievement overall. Every additional year of a mother's education has a particularly strong impact on the educational attainment of her girl children in particular. Literacy levels of fathers and other caregivers are also crucial in that they strengthen the chances that young children will have positive reading role models in the home. A caregiver's modelling of literacy conveys the message that reading is a critical element of education and economic opportunities.^{22 23}

5. A Strong Start Pays Off

There is ample evidence that participation in early learning activities can have a profound impact in children's health, economic standing and quality of life from that point forward. As children grow older, education helps them escape from poverty and can prevent poverty from being passed from one generation to another. Education helps those in paid formal employment earn more and can help workers in the agriculture and informal sectors lift themselves to a higher plane.

According to the 2013-14 EFA Global Monitoring Report, if all students in low-income countries left school with basic reading skills, 171 million people could be lifted out of poverty, which would be equivalent to a 12 percent decrease in world poverty. The report cites the example of Tanzania, where 82 percent of workers who had less than primary education were below the poverty line. But working adults with primary education were 20 percent less likely to be poor, while secondary education reduced the chances of being poor by almost 60 percent.

Education is universally recognized as one of the determining factors in adults maintaining good health and in saving children's lives. Educated mothers are better able to prevent their children from becoming

¹⁷ Scarborough, H. S. (1998). Early identification of children at risk for reading disabilities: Phonological awareness and some other promising predictors. *Specific reading disability: A view of the spectrum*, 75-119.

¹⁸ Lonigan, C. J., Schatschneider, C., & Westberg, L. (2008). Identification of children's skills and abilities linked to later outcomes in reading, writing, and spelling. *Developing early literacy: Report of the national early literacy panel*, 55-106.

¹⁹ Lonigan, C. J., Burgess, S. R., & Anthony, J. L. (2000). Development of emergent literacy and early reading skills in preschool children: evidence from a latent-variable longitudinal study. *Developmental psychology*, 36(5), 596.

²⁰ Wagner, R. K., Torgesen, J. K., Rashotte, C. A., Hecht, S. A., Barker, T. A., Burgess, S. R., ... & Garon, T. (1997). Changing relations between phonological processing abilities and word-level reading as children develop from beginning to skilled readers: a 5-year longitudinal study. *Developmental psychology*, 33(3), 468.

²¹ Sénéchal, M., & LeFevre, J. A. (2002). Parental involvement in the development of children's reading skill: A five-year longitudinal study. *Child development*, 73(2), 445-460.

²² Writing the wrongs: international benchmarks on adult literacy. Global Campaign for Education, 2005.

²³ Mullis, I. V. S., Martin, M. O., Kennedy, A. M., & Foy, P. (2007). *PIRLS 2006 International Report. IEA's Progress in International Reading Literacy Study in Primary School in 40 countries*. Chestnut Hill, MA: Boston College

sick and malnourished; those with an education know more about diseases, recognize warning signs and are more likely to seek treatment when their children become ill. The EFA has projected that if all girls in school today completed their primary education, there would be 66 percent fewer maternal deaths and the lives of 150,000 children would be saved. If girls go on to complete secondary education, 2.8 million children could be saved.

Workers in the informal economic sector also benefit from education. The EFA reports that educated people are more likely to start a business, and their businesses are likely to be more profitable. In Uganda, owners of household enterprises with a primary education earned 36 percent more than those with no education; those with a lower secondary education earned 56 percent more.

Early childhood interventions not only have a high cost-benefit ratio, but also a higher rate of return for each dollar invested than interventions directed at older children and young adults. Evidence suggests a potential rate of 7-16 percent annually from high quality early childhood development programs targeting vulnerable groups.

- **Internationally**, the World Bank and other agencies have estimated the rate of return at \$3 for every \$1 spent, and returns may double when the most vulnerable children are targeted.
- **In the United States**, research shows that society sees a saving of \$7 for every \$1 spent on early childhood programs for low-income children.

PART 2: OUR IMPACT IN CHILDREN'S EARLY LEARNING

Save the Children has been developing and supporting early childhood development programs for over 20 years and advocating and influencing national education policies that benefit young children and their families. Globally, our early childhood development portfolio covers 75 countries and reaches more than 2.1 million children ages 0-6 every year. Domestically, our portfolio of programs reaches nearly 190,000 children ages 0-10 in 17 states.

I. PROGRAM DELIVERY

A. International

Before young children can begin to learn reading and math, they need to develop the physical, cognitive and social skills to use a pencil, follow a story and listen quietly to a teacher. That's why Save the Children places such a high priority on giving children under age 5 a strong start so they are ready to learn. Globally, our community-based early learning and early childhood development programs are found in many disadvantaged communities, benefiting children directly and educating parents and community members on the importance of early childhood development.

We invite parents and community members to lead and join activities that promote the skills children need as they learn, starting in infancy. Our programs often draw on the community's culture and traditions, presenting stories and songs in the local language. Teachers and volunteers make many of the books, toys and games out of local materials.

Participation in early childhood development can also bridge the gap between children coming from literacy-rich and literacy-poor households. Our programs play a crucial role in helping children from low-literacy homes gain skills for school readiness and catch up to their peers who come from homes where parents read, sing, tell stories and teach children something new. We also help bridge the home-

school connection so that parents, even if they can't read themselves, can support their children's language development. The more parents are involved, the more children are able to succeed in school.

We Start Early: From the prenatal stage through age 3, every child has a right to good primary health care; a nutritious diet; responsive parenting; and a safe, clean, and stimulating physical, social and safe environments in which to grow and develop. Our programs support early childhood development for children 0-3 in all regions of the world; we work closely with community health workers and caregivers of young children to integrate simulation and responsive care into health and nutrition services to strengthen childrearing practices.

We have employed this strategy with success in El Salvador as one country example. At the onset, Save the Children discovered that only 1.8 percent of Salvadoran children ages 0-3 had access to educational programming to support their development. We partnered with the country's National Academy of Pediatrics to create a screening tool to assess children's language, cognitive and socio-emotional development and to detect delays. In 2013, the Ministry of Health integrated this screening tool as part of the health care system's regular "well child" checkups that children under age 5 receive. As part of the roll-out, Save the Children helped to train over 2,000 health officials and workers to use the screening tool. The indicators have become a core part of the Ministry's quality standards and the Ministry has created a budget line to ensure that the tool will be reproduced, disseminated and used in health facilities across the country.

We Provide Parent Support Groups: Working with the youngest children also means working through parents in home visitation or parent groups, as we also do in El Salvador. Parent groups meet once or twice a month to learn activities to play with their babies and toddlers, and discuss their children's development, health, hygiene and responsive caregiving. With El Salvador having one of the highest levels of teenage pregnancy in the world, these groups support young mothers and give them a safe space to learn and their children to play.

We Provide Access to Quality Early Learning Environments that Foster Play and Exploration: Between ages 3 and 5, children more fully develop their intellectual and social potential. Safe, caring, play-based and stimulating environments help fulfil children's rights to participation and non-discrimination. The United Nations Convention on the rights of the Child asserts it is a child's right "to engage in play" as an essential part of their well-being.²⁴ Different types of play allow children to learn new skills that build a strong foundation for their education and their future. Play develops abilities such as cognitive function, motor and social skills, and conflict resolution²⁵.

We focus on Emerging Math and Literacy Skills: Learning to read and write is fundamental to children's success in school and optimal life trajectory, regardless of socio-economic status. A strong body of research documents the crucial links between emergent literacy skills and later reading outcomes and clearly shows that reading and the process of becoming literate is intertwined with the experiences children have with language and print from birth onwards.²⁶

Our Emergent Literacy and Math (ELM) initiative seeks to ensure that our preschool programs boost critical aspects of younger children's school readiness. ELM resources and guidance focus on print-rich early learning environments and play-based interactive exposure to early literacy and math skills—like

²⁴ Stuart Lester and Wendy Russell. *Children's Right to Play: An examination of the importance of play in the lives of children worldwide*. The Hague, The Netherlands: Bernard Van Leer Foundation, 2010

²⁵ Meg Carter, "The Power of Play," Child Fund International, 20 November 2013

²⁶ Mullis, I. V. S., Martin, M. O., Kennedy, A. M., & Foy, P. (2007). *PIRLS 2006 International Report*. IEA's Progress in International Reading Literacy Study in Primary School in 40 countries. Chestnut Hill, MA: Boston College.

speaking and listening, alphabet awareness, sorting and measuring. Ten Save the Children country offices piloted ELM in 2014 and an additional seven in Africa plan roll outs by 2015.

We Improve Transitions to Primary School: Between ages 6 and 8, the transition from home or preschool into primary school can be especially difficult for vulnerable children. This is clearly demonstrated by high dropout rates that occur in the first two years of primary school within many developing nations. We seek to ensure that families, preschools and schools provide the support children need to confidently enter school. Our programs emphasize training and support to lower primary grade teachers, after-school learning camps and reading circles to support children's learning.

We are Reaching Very Vulnerable Children: Given the evidence that the most vulnerable children in a community are likely to have the lowest developmental and school readiness outcomes, one of our more recent innovations integrates learning with caregiving, with a special focus on children affected by HIV/AIDS. The Essential Package of materials links caregivers and children to needed services that they are currently not accessing due to social isolation; or to fill gaps where services do not exist.

We Impact Change at Scale: Save the Children's *Theory of Change* is the blueprint we use to achieve maximum impact in our programs, to work at scale, to inform our global thought leadership on issues affecting children, and to leverage partnerships with other stakeholders. It codifies the key drivers of our work: i) *be the innovator* with evidence-based, replicable best practices in program implementation; ii) *be the voice for children* and advocate for policy and program changes; iii) *build partnerships* with children, families, communities, governments, civil society and the private sector to create sustainable change; and iv) *achieve results at scale* through effective implementation on the ground.

Our success in Mozambique is one example of our actualizing the *Theory of Change* to address an early learning need. In 2008, we launched the "Art of Learning" early childhood development program in recognition that less than 4 percent of children have access to early learning opportunities. The program's objective was to prepare children in four key areas: socio-emotional development; precise motor coordination; thinking skills; and language skills. The program drew upon community inputs and trained volunteer teachers using a dynamic and interactive curriculum. We conducted parenting discussion groups on key topics to promote child well-being and utilized local materials to produce books, toys and games that stimulated children's learning.

A two-year impact evaluation of the program, the first of its kind in Africa, was conducted in collaboration with the World Bank. Program evaluation results revealed that participating children significantly outperformed their peers in problem-solving skills, comparing objects, and counting. Interviews with parents and caregivers demonstrated that the program's activities built their children's social and emotional skills. The Ministry of Education recognized the importance of early childhood development in improving primary school indicators and our results supported the Ministry's efforts to successfully negotiate a \$40 million loan from the World Bank to develop a national ECD pre-school program based on the Save the Children model.

B. In the U.S.

Save the Children's domestic program model is predicated on our ability to work in close partnership with public schools, local and state governments, and community organizations to build evidence-based model programs that are scalable, replicable and accountable. Our programs have proven to be structured sufficiently to produce predictably positive results yet flexible enough to meet the unique needs of each community where we work.

We focus our early learning work in rural communities to achieve grade-level reading proficiency for children. We begin our ECD work prenatally and follow at-risk children through elementary school. We accomplish this life cycle approach by building a continuum of supports that encourage literacy, promote health and wellness, engage families, promote parental involvement and foster a positive connection between families and schools.

Our cost-effective Early Steps to School Success (Early Steps) program offers a wide range of services to promote optimal “whole child” (cognitive, social/emotional and physical) development. Early Steps currently reaches 7,225 children ages 0-5 in the most remote and impoverished parts of 14 states (including communities in Appalachia, the Gulf States, tribal regions in Arizona, California’s Central Valley and San Bernardino County and the Pacific Northwest coast). The demographics of the communities we serve are diverse and together represent African-American, Caucasian, Hispanic and Native American families. Sixty-nine percent of children are enrolled in Early Steps before their first birthday, when interventions can have the greatest impact. Children who participate in Early Steps are among the most vulnerable in their communities, facing an average of 5.7 risk factors that are associated with low educational achievement, such as smoking or substance abuse in the home, parents with low educational attainment, teenage or single parents, unemployed parents, or poverty.

We Start Early: Through Early Steps’ home visits, prenatally to age 3, parents and families are given the guidance they need to support their baby’s development from the very start. Our home-based program coordinators use the Early Steps PLAN and PLAY curriculum to provide parents with the information they need to support responsive and positive parent-child interactions, understand how children’s school readiness skills develop from birth and nurture those readiness skills in the first three years. During home visits, parents discover ways to infuse everyday interactions and activities into teachable moments that build social-emotional, language and literacy, physical/motor, and thinking skills—the developmental domains that form the foundation for school readiness skills.

We Encourage Play: In the first three years, children acquire school readiness skills through enriching play—either on their own, with peers, or with adults—as well as through everyday interactions with parents and caregivers. Babies come into the world ready to learn. They are naturally curious and eager to make sense of the world around them. Very young children do not need formal instruction, or “teaching.” In fact, trying to teach a young child a concept he is not ready for may backfire. Through play, children learn to regulate their behavior, lay the foundations for later learning in science and mathematics, understand the complex negotiations of social relationships, build a repertoire of creative problem solving skills, and much more. During the first three years, billions of brain cells and trillions of connections are being made. A child’s relationships and experiences during the early years greatly influence how her brain grows. Research shows that children learn best through everyday experiences with the people they love and trust, and when the learning is fun.

We Emphasize Emergent Literacy and Math: Learning to read and write doesn’t start in kindergarten or first grade. Developing language, literacy and math skills begins at birth through everyday loving interactions such as sharing books, telling stories, singing songs, and talking to one another. Adults—parents, grandparents and teachers—play a very important role in preparing young children for future school success and in becoming self-confident and motivated learners.

We Improve Transitions to Elementary School: We partner with local elementary schools to create connections between home and school that begin at birth and continue until the child enters kindergarten. These connections enable parents, schools and communities to better support children’s academic success in the early years and beyond.

We Support Emerging and Developing Readers: Our in-school, afterschool and summer literacy programming is intended to accelerate the reading achievement of children in grades 2-6 who are struggling and have been identified as below-grade level readers. *In-school support* provides reading software and books for use by children during the school day to provide additional time for guided independent reading practice. At some sites trained volunteers, including Foster Grandparents, support children's opportunities to read more effectively. *Afterschool programming* provides children with access to daily literacy activities, including an hour-long "literacy block" of guided independent reading practice and read-aloud, vocabulary and fluency-building. Small-group tutoring sessions that target phonics, sight words, vocabulary and comprehension may also be incorporated. *Summer programs* also provide children with access to the literacy block and emergent reader activities for beginning readers. Our summer programs help children maintain or enhance reading skills and knowledge gained over the school year, and seek to decrease summer reading loss.

A Head Start Provider: As part of our ongoing commitment to the provision of high quality early childhood development and education programs in rural poor communities across the country, Save the Children has become a local Head Start provider. Effective December 5 of this year, we will have received \$20.1 million in funding through the Federal Administration of Children and Families to provide Head Start and/or Early Head Start early childhood education services to reach 2,700 children in 44 facilities in Louisiana and in the delta region of Arkansas and Mississippi. Our commitment to provide Head Start services currently runs through 2019.

II. IMPACT MEASUREMENT TOOLS

A. International

Several pieces of rigorous, academic research have been influential in advancing early learning for children. For example, research of Save the Children-supported community-based preschools in Mozambique has led to scaling up across the country. Currently, partnerships are underway with the World Bank to research nutrition in early childhood development programs in Malawi and Bangladesh, with the London School of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene to explore how malaria affects children's cognition, and with the University College of London to research the Essential Package in Africa.

The IDELA Breakthrough for Measuring Children's Development Internationally

In September 2014, Save the Children launched the International Development and Early Learning Assessment (IDELA), a groundbreaking tool to measure child development and early learning outcomes among the 3-6 age group. It will also reinforce our standing as a global thought leader in this field.

IDELA covers four developmental domains: physical development, early language and literacy, early numeracy/problem solving, and socio-emotional skills. In addition, IDELA can also measure persistence, memory and attention, some of the critical cognitive skills that are indicators of later achievement. With quick availability of information using IT platforms, the data from IDELA can help education and early childhood development stakeholders across countries identify which strategies will most effectively improve results for children.

IDELA is easily translated and administered, and has strong reliability and validity. This tool is already being looked at by other partners like UNESCO and the World Bank as a global prototype.

We also use other rigorous tools to assess the impact of our programs on young children, and we are further able to build the evidence base through our child sponsorship-funded work. This funding ensures we can commit to a long-term presence in a community, gain local buy-in and develop strong

partnerships. Through sponsorship funding, we have tested, refined and scaled up early learning innovations including integrating early childhood development into nutrition and health programs in Nepal, Bangladesh, Philippines, El Salvador and Egypt; boosting the quality of early learning programs through Emergent Literacy and Math in Ethiopia, Bangladesh and Nepal; and testing and documenting nationally scalable community preschool models in Mozambique and Bangladesh.

Some topline results of these assessments include:

- In Ethiopia, preschool-age children who participated in Emergent Math and Literacy gained 43.7 percentage points in language domains and 49 percentage points in math domains on school readiness assessments versus a comparison group with no preschool, who progressed less than 3 percentage points in language and 2 percentage points in math over the course of a year.
- The same pattern was seen in Bangladesh, where children who attended a high-quality ECD program (with a focus on language and early math) showed impressive gains in school readiness skills—nearly three times higher compared to their peers without access to ECD.

In the U.S.

At the end of each program year, Save the Children conducts an annual independent external evaluation of its programs. We have a strong process in place to use this data to benefit both individual children/students and the program as a whole. Our monitoring process involves regular consultations at the site/school between program staff and the site staff/school teachers and administrators. Additionally, we conduct an annual intensive partner planning process between Save the Children, our partner sites, and program staff.

Each year, 3- and 5-year-olds who have been in Early Steps for 12 months or more before turning 3 are given the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT). The PPVT is a widely used, standardized tool to measure pre-literacy skills, a strong predictor of future school success. Typically, low-income children and children who have multiple risk factors score well below the national mean (100) on the PPVT. Nationally, the cumulative result for 3-year-olds since Early Steps began is 95.9—well within the mean range of 85-115, and well above the average of participants in similar early childhood programs. In 2014, 84 percent of 3-year-olds and 84 percent of 5-year-olds in Early Steps had vocabulary development scores at or above normal—demonstrating that our program is achieving a significant improvement over conventional expectations of early childhood interventions provided to children facing strong barriers to success. This achievement is especially significant because we know from research that when a child has more than four risk factors, interventions often do not help the child improve. As noted earlier, children enrolled in Early Steps have an average of 5.7 risk factors associated with low educational achievement.

Save the Children recently contracted with a well-known team of researchers to evaluate Early Steps' effectiveness in rural communities across several states, particularly in assessing the impact of a home visiting program. This five-year evaluation, which runs through the fall of 2016, is among the first systematic examinations of the impacts of a home-based program that aims to enhance the school readiness and early academic outcomes (e.g., literacy skills) of young children ages 0-5 from rural communities. The project is a collaborative effort involving three universities: George Mason University, University of Maryland, and University of Nebraska, Lincoln.

III. POLICY SETTING AND SUSTAINABILITY

Although the value of early childhood development is recognized, many countries make pre-primary education a relatively low priority in public spending. Globally, it's estimated that less than 10 percent of total public education expenditure is allocated for preschool education; over half of countries allocated less than 5 percent. In general, few countries have established national frameworks to finance, coordinate and supervise preschool programs for infants and toddlers. There are also no benchmarks or

quantitative targets for monitoring progress to increase provision of early childhood development services, making it even more challenging to build the case for investments.

A. International - Influencing the post-2015 Agenda

In 2000, the UN adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), global targets for achieving profound changes for the least-served and least-advantaged populations worldwide by 2015. Ever since the dialogue on “what comes next” began several years ago, Save the Children has been using its technical expertise, strong credibility as a leader in education and strong relationships with governments and high-level actors to help build consensus around our proposed agenda for the post-2015 landscape.

Save the Children was one of the first agencies to begin engaging in post-2015 conversations in both academic and political fora and are well-placed with both governments and the UN to advocate for change. We believe that the next global framework must focus specifically on what children require to become active, productive citizens. Nothing is more fundamental to this than learning.

We are seeking to influence a post-MDG framework in which education goals shift from increasing children’s access to education to improved learning outcomes, especially for the most disadvantaged children. We are placing a strong emphasis on learning outcomes such as literacy and numeracy, as these skills help children gain the knowledge they need to thrive in the 21st century, and on promoting the inclusion of early childhood development in the next global development goals. We are working with partners such as UNICEF and the Consultative Group on Early Childhood Development and have attended events such as the ECD Champions at the United Nations General Assembly at the invitation of President Michelle Bachelet of Chile.

B. Domestic Policy Setting

In the U.S., 40 states and the District of Columbia have state-funded pre-K programs serving primarily 4-year-olds but necessarily universal. Ten states do not offer any state-funded pre-K program.

In 2013, we created a 501(c)(4) organization, the Save the Children Action Network (SCAN). SCAN will work to build support for existing and new funding streams at the federal, state, and local levels; including the Strong Start for America’s Children Act to fund preschool for 4-year-old children from families earning below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level, and encourage states to spend their own funds to support preschool for young children with family incomes above that income level.

Through SCAN, Save the Children will also seek to mobilize citizens to take action in support of early childhood education in the U.S. With increased grassroots and grassroots outreach in target districts; strategic, research-based communications; and new electoral capacity that enables us to publish voting records, outline candidates’ positions, and more, SCAN will help us send a strong message to politicians during elections.

IV. STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

Mobilizing communities and building partnerships with a variety of stakeholders at all levels is a primary strength of our early childhood development work domestically and internationally. We work with parents/ caregivers, teachers/facilitators, communities, Ministries of Education and other government agencies, nongovernmental organizations, academia and other institutions to help improve the lives of young children and fulfill their right to development and education. Our efforts impact children directly and create long-term commitment to early childhood programs that are powerful catalysts for achieving Education for All and promoting equity.

Our international partnerships include:

- *Global Partnership for Education, GIZ, UNICEF, the Aga Khan Foundation* and other stakeholders with whom we are working to promote pre-primary education in Africa, which culminated in a Pan-African meeting of 12-plus countries in November 2014.
- The *Learning Metrics Task Force*, through which we advocate for early learning to be part of the education debate worldwide.
- The *Asia Regional Network for Early Childhood*, which builds strong partnerships across sectors and different disciplines, organizations, agencies and institutions in the Asia-Pacific region to advance the agenda on and investment in early childhood. We are part of the Executive Committee and among the thought leaders in the region and share best practices from many countries.

Save the Children is also part of a UNESCO-led effort to create a global prototype for countries to measure child development outcomes. As part of the expert advisory committee for this effort, we also work with academics, UNICEF, Brookings Institution, and other global ECD leaders. In several countries, our programs are being evaluated by the World Bank's Strategic Impact Evaluation Funds as part of the global early childhood development agenda to identify what works best for children.

Our U.S. partnerships include:

- *Zero to Three*, with whom we have co-developed our Early Steps Plan and Play Curriculum and which developed our Gather Round curriculum. Zero to Three provides several trainings per year on topics relevant to the field of early childhood—specifically infants, toddlers, and their families. With the support of Zero to Three and our home visiting partners, SCAN is calling on Congress to reauthorize the bipartisan-supported Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program. Together, we are working to ensure Congress extends funding for evidence-based home visiting programs that help children and families in 50 states, six territories, and numerous tribes and tribal home visiting programs.
- *First Focus*, which is also a SCAN partner. We are working with First Focus to ensure investments in children are a top priority in the Congressional budget and annual appropriations process. By mobilizing advocates and stakeholders, we are working to ensure our elected officials focus on children.
- *Reach Out and Read*, which is collaborating with us on the new *Building Child-Centered Communities in Rural America* project. In 30 under-served rural communities in Arizona, Colorado, Kentucky and South Carolina, the program will build strong partnerships with school districts, schools, local and state governments, and local organizations so communities can support children with early education, literacy resources and health services. Key elements of the project include providing books to families; supporting local libraries with books, tablets and eBooks; mobilizing community collaboration and strengthening links between homes and health clinics. At each clinic, doctors will teach parents about the value of reading aloud and giving each child a new, age- and developmentally-appropriate book to take home and keep.
- The *First Five Years Fund*, which is helping our SCAN team to increase both national and state-level investments in high-quality early childhood education. Through communications and legislative outreach, we are highlighting the efforts of the many governors and state legislatures that are proposing policies to improve and expand high-quality early learning programs as well as supporting the passage of comprehensive, national early childhood education legislation.
- The *Bezos Family Foundation* provides funding to education and improve life outcomes for children. We are also exploring a potential partnership to field test a new app, Vroom, which would provide parents with ideas for turning everyday moments into brain-building opportunities for children.

- The *University of Washington's ILABS*, which provides training to our program staff, who then cascade what they learn to our local Early Steps program partners. Through these trainings, our staff develop competencies in the latest science of child development, such as early brain development, children's imitation, or language acquisition.
- *The University of Nebraska*, which is leading the Early Steps research project noted previously, with George Mason University and the University of Maryland.

PART 3: DRIVING THE PUBLIC AND CONSUMERS TO ACTION

In 2014, Save the Children introduced an early learning cause platform to raise awareness among U.S. consumers of the early learning deficit children living in poverty experience. Our campaign goal is to inspire action and raise critical funds to support our work in the U.S. and around the world. By mobilizing our celebrity ambassadors, corporate partners and supporters, we hope to bring greater awareness to this critically important issue.

Launch activities timed around International Literacy Day on September 8, 2014 included the launch of our #FindtheWords social media campaign, with a 30 Days/30 Words blogger challenge and a one-day celebrity virtual word-a-thon. We plan to scale up the campaign in 2015 through greater use of social and online platforms, a live event during the “back-to-school” season, corporate partner engagement and cross-promotion with collaboration partners addressing early learning deficits with other stakeholders.

PART 4: OUR EARLY LEARNING AGENDA GOING FORWARD

More attention and resources are needed to expand effective programs and make greater strides for children whose strong start in school and future opportunities are inextricably linked to their development and awareness of early education at every level—from parents to national governments. Save the Children is committed to ongoing research and program development that will help determine the kinds of interventions we will focus on, in which contexts, and which delivery mechanisms have the most impact for young children. Where financial resources already exist to deliver targeted programs for children, integrating early childhood development strategies and technical assistance will also help leverage greater results in the short and long term.

Community Preschools

The Preschool Toolbox provides guidance for designing, implementing and improving the quality of community-based preschool programs for children age 3-6 years and their families, as well as to support the transition into primary classes for children ages 6-8. Community preschool interventions are at the core of our ECD portfolio, with over 15 countries implementing early education programs. The toolbox draws on our resources and experiences for simple, “go-to” adaptable tools and guides that can be used to support quality early education in multiple contexts and through different delivery mechanisms. It can also foster learning across country experiences.

Emergent Literacy and Math (ELM)

Emergent Literacy and Math (ELM) enables our preschool programs to boost critical aspects of children's school readiness and ensure that they begin primary school ready to succeed. ELM resources and guidance focus on print-rich early learning environments and play-based interactive exposure to early literacy and math skills – like speaking and listening, alphabet awareness, sorting, and measurement among others. Supporting early literacy and numeracy in preschools draws a natural link to our Literacy/Numeracy Boost programs and the Education Global Initiative, while responding to opportunities opened by the global focus on improved reading and learning outcomes.

Early Stimulation and Nutrition

Early care and stimulation are key components to help counteract the negative developmental impact of malnutrition. Nutrition interventions combined with early stimulation (play, smiling and talking with children, storytelling, singing, educational toys and other positive adult-child interaction) has double the impact to help children survive and thrive. In fact, early stimulation even without nutritional supplementation has been proven to improve brain development. To maximize the impact for children, early stimulation messaging should be an integral part of programs to address malnutrition. This can include working with parents and caregivers to support them in offering responsive, positive and stimulating environment for infants and toddlers, from prenatal to age 3. In addition, nutrition interventions can be integrated into preschool programs for children ages 3-6 to reach out to their families to reinforce nutrition in the home.

Save the Children's work will build off current activities in Bangladesh, Nepal and India focused to integrate early childhood care and development in nutrition programs for children ages 0-3 and in Mali and Malawi to integrate nutrition into preschools for children ages 3-6.

Early Childhood Care and Development in Emergencies

As a global leader in delivering education to children affected by emergencies, we are well placed to ensure that emergency preparedness and responses includes early childhood care and development.. Evidence shows that children under age 5 are more susceptible to the traumatic effects of emergencies. Trauma can leave a permanent imprint on brain development and social/emotional development that will limit a child's potential for the rest of his/her life. Drawing on our Healing and Education through the Arts (HEART) program in multiple countries, we can identify tools, resources and strategies to better address the specific education needs of young children in all phases of emergencies. Externally, we will seek to foster partnerships with the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) and other stakeholders to raise visibility and increase focus for early childhood care and development in emergencies.

Globally, across Save the Children International's network of members and country offices, trends and requests for support are also steering us in new directions. For example, we are seeking to place more emphasis on **responsive parenting** for children 0-3 years, as evidence suggests that the most critical development period is prenatal to age 3. These early years determine learning, behavior, physical, and emotional health, which can ultimately affect future opportunities and earning potential. Interventions for parents of children in this age group could focus on improving parent-child interaction through diverse delivery systems and aim to address the equity gap that is initiated during this most crucial period of development.