

# UT Kids Count: early childhood education underfunded

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SALT LAKE CITY - There should be greater focus and more funding for high-quality education during the critical first eight years of a child's life, according to Terry Haven with Voices for Utah Children. She cited [research](#) in the new report from the Annie E. Casey Foundation Kids Count Project, "The First Eight Years: Giving Kids a Foundation for Lifetime Success."

The study found that children who get higher-quality education in their early years are more likely to graduate from high school and attend college. Research involving 13,000 children nationwide found that just 36 percent of third-graders are on track in cognitive knowledge and skills.

Haven said the first few years are critical in a child's development.

"We know that the brain architecture is built within those first eight years, and it's really difficult and costly for kids to catch up later in life. So by the time they turn eight, many U.S. third-graders already are behind where they need to be in those key areas that we know are going to help them succeed," Haven said.

More needs to be done for early education in Utah, where nearly 70 percent of 3- and 4-year-olds in low-income families are not enrolled in preschool, she said.

The report said that just 19 percent of third-graders in families with income below 200 percent of the poverty level and half of those in families with incomes above that level had developed age-appropriate cognitive skills. It also found that just 14 percent of African-American children and 19 percent of Hispanic children are on track in cognitive development.

Haven said parents can help their children's development.

"Make sure that they get stimulation, that they hear new words. Don't just plop them in front of the TV, but actually have conversations with them. Even when they can't talk back to you, they hear that conversation and they hear the words and it becomes part of their structure," she explained.

The Kids Count report concluded that there should be better access to high-quality programs for kids age 8 and under. It also recommended making bigger investments in programs that target low-income children.

"The First Eight Years: Giving Kids a Foundation for Lifetime Success," is available at [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org).