



Potts Family Foundation

## The Importance of Early Childhood Development and the Private Sector

by Craig Knutson  
President/CEO  
*Potts Family Foundation*

The Oklahoma Business Roundtable funded a proposal by the Potts Family Foundation to determine effective ways to educate the private sector about early childhood development (ECD) programs and services. Our research indicates that the private sector has a very modest understanding of the importance of ECD and related evidence-based programs that exist for many families their companies employ.

Initial strategies involved meeting with key chambers of commerce across the state. In the Fall of 2018, I met with Jon Blankenship of the Enid Chamber of Commerce and shared a packet of information. Since then, I have met with over 30 chambers of commerce. My information provided the neuroscience of early brain formation and how proven parenting skills can prepare for both school and the workforce. My “ask” included options for reaching the private sector with this message.

Jon allowed me to share this information through your newsletter and introduced me to Cheri Ezzell and Human Services Alliance of Greater Enid. My message to Jon and other chamber executives focused on two themes: How evidence-based learning experiences from birth to five dramatically decrease gaps in achievement AND how business investment in early childhood leads to a better skilled workforce.

While genes provide a blueprint for the brain, neuroscience shows that a child’s environment and experiences carry out the construction of the brain. Further, a child’s vocabulary at age three can predict 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading ability without interventions. Oklahoma’s low performance in math and reading scores is easily explainable as too many children enter kindergarten already behind.

The economic research also demonstrates that early investments not only improve a child’s character and cognitive development but provide a strong return-on-investment for quality programs supported by our tax dollars. The research is clear: school readiness improves, special education placements decline, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading scores improve, grade retention declines, high school graduation rates improve, and adult earnings rise.

To learn more about how to improve our future workforce, e-mail [cknutson@pottsfamilyfoundation.org](mailto:cknutson@pottsfamilyfoundation.org) and I’ll share the evidence and rationale.