Contents

Acknowledgments xi

Preface xiii

1 Introduction 1
   What Are Early Childhood Education Programs? 2
   What Are the Benefits from Early Childhood Education? 4
   How Can Early Childhood Education Affect the Child’s Future Life Course? 5
   A Proposal for Early Childhood Education 6
   The Plan of the Book 7

2 What Is the Evidence on the Earnings Effects of High-Quality Early Childhood Education, and Why Should We Believe It? 9
   Why the Research Evidence for Early Childhood Education Is Credible 9
   Random Assignment Studies 10
   Other Long-Term Studies with Good Comparison Groups: Head Start 11
   The Chicago Child-Parent Center Program 12
   Predicting Long-Term Earnings Effects from Short-Term Test Score Effects 13
   Infant Health and Development Program 15
   North Carolina’s Smart Start Program, and More at Four 16
   State and Local Pre-K Programs: The Regression Discontinuity Evidence 17
   Summary of the Evidence 19

3 How Do the Adult Earnings Benefits of High-Quality Early Childhood Education Compare to Costs? 23
   Future Earnings versus Present Costs 23
   Parental Earnings 26
   Are These Effects Large? 26
   Closing Comments 27
4 Criticisms of the Research Evidence

Criticism 1: The Evidence for Early Childhood Education’s Benefits Only Comes from Small and Expensive Experiments Run a Long Time Ago

Criticism 2: Early Childhood Education Is Argued to Be Ineffective because the Recent Head Start Experiment Has Test Score Effects That Quickly Faded to Statistical Insignificance

Criticism 3: Why Haven’t Oklahoma and Georgia, Two States That Have Prominently Adopted Universal Pre-K, Been More Obviously Successful in Improving Test Scores and Other Social Indicators?

Criticism 4: The Recent Tennessee Pre-K Experiment Shows That Test Score Effects Quickly Fade, Which Raises Questions about whether State Pre-K Programs Are Effective

Concluding Comments

5 How Can Early Childhood Education Programs Best Be Designed?

Quality of Teacher-Child Interactions
Class Size and Teacher Credentials
Middle-Class Children
Program Duration
Earlier versus Later Interventions

6 Spillover Benefits: How Does Early Childhood Education Affect Other Groups Than Those Families Directly Served by These Programs?

Skill Spillovers
Peer Effects in Education
Spillovers from Reducing Crime
Government/Taxpayer Benefits
Pre-K: The Next Generation
Concluding Comments
7 A Proposed Early Childhood Education Strategy
   Full-Day Universal Pre-K for Four-Year-Olds 61
   Targeted Educare/Abecedarian for All Disadvantaged Children 63
   Nurse Family Partnership for All Disadvantaged First-Time Mothers Costs 64
   Aggregate Benefits 66
   Accountability and Quality Improvement 68
   What Level of Government Should Be Responsible for Early Childhood Education? 69
   Concluding Comments 71

8 Why Early Childhood Education Makes Sense Now: ECE’s Place in the Ongoing Struggle for Broader Economic Opportunities
   Labor Supply and Labor Demand 73
   History Matters 73
   The Continuing Argument over Expanding Educational Access 74
   But Why Early Childhood Education? And Why Now? 76
   Doing the Good We Know How to Do 77

Notes 79
References 93
Author 103
Index 105
About the Institute 113
Figures

2.1 How Test Scores of Tulsa Pre-K Entrants and Former Pre-K Students Vary with Age 19
3.1 Average Percentage Increase in Adult Earnings for Three Early Childhood Education Programs 24
4.1 Predicted Percentage Effects on Adult Earnings of Early Childhood Programs, Based on Test Scores versus Adult Outcomes 33
6.1 Effects of a 1 Percent Increase in Metro Workers Who Are College Graduates on a Metro Area’s Average Wages 55

Tables

2.1 Adult Earnings Effects, Compared with Predicted Earnings Effects Based on Test Scores 14
3.1 Per-Child Earnings Benefits versus Costs of Three Early Childhood Programs 25
5.1 How Earnings Benefits of Pre-K per Child Vary for Children from Different Income Groups 47
7.1 Benefits versus Costs per Child of Adding Educare to Pre-K 63
7.2 Annual National Costs of Large-Scale Early Childhood Education Proposal 65