Talking Points for Connecting Early Childhood Development & Economic Security Issues

To invite the public into the growing conversation about meeting the needs of children and their families at the same time, through coordinated policies and programs, it is important for advocates to adopt a Core Story Approach, anticipating and answering the questions that attend to every social issue. *Why does this issue matter to us all? What are the mechanisms at play here - and what's going wrong? What should we do to move forward?* Without clear cues from communicators for how to think about these questions, members of the public will fill in individual-level causes and solutions, and are likely to miss the common good perspective on the issue. The following talking points shift the focus from individual causes and consequences of poverty to collective risks and benefits; foster understanding of the mechanisms and processes at play; and set up a more productive frame in which to advance public policies.

These talking points can be used flexibly – as a source of themes for longer written pieces, as responses in media interviews or public appearances, or as set-ups to "pre-frame" a conversation on specific policy or program proposals. Each pulls from rigorously tested messages that have been shown to expand public thinking about the most effective ways to support children, families, and communities. They need not be used word-for-word, but when adapting, communicators should take care to maintain the core frame elements in each. Likewise, every point need not be used in every communication, but in choosing among them, communicators should take care to tell a complete story, with at least a *Value – Explanation – Solution* structure.

Why does this matter to society? What's at stake?

Shared Prosperity

Ensuring positive outcomes for all members of our community contributes to our shared prosperity—both now and into the future. When we promote economic stability for families, we all benefit from better outcomes in education, health, and more. When a society invests wisely in children, the next generation pays it back through a lifetime of productivity and responsible citizenship.

What are the mechanisms at play in "two generation" issues?
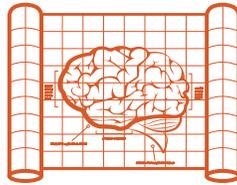
Brain Architecture

Just as homes are constructed over time, the human brain is built through a process that begins before birth and continues into adulthood. Establishing a sound architecture involves laying a solid foundation and coordinating systems. So too with the developing brain. We know that early experiences literally shape how the brain gets built, that a strong foundation in the early years increases the probability of positive outcomes, and that a weak foundation increases the odds of later difficulties. Just as with a house, you can remodel later on, but it's more costly than getting it right the first time. When we support the development of sturdy brain architecture – through approaches like [*access to stable housing, home visiting initiatives, etc.*] - we support the development of the skills and abilities that will be available to our communities in the long run.

Resilience Scale

There are many influences on the outcomes we're seeing in our community/state, and they work a lot like a scale that has two sides. One side gets loaded with positive things, like supportive relationships, good jobs,

access to stimulating learning settings, and so on. The other side gets stacked with negative things, like poverty, violence, or ill health. Resilience is when the overall outcome is positive, despite negative experiences or events. We all want a resilient community - and we can build resilience. When we take steps to remove negative weights, and when we stack positive factors on the scales, we all benefit from communities that are stronger, more productive, and more vibrant.

What threatens positive outcomes for children, families, and communities?

Breakdown in Serve and Return

Like the back-and-forth serve and return in games like tennis and volleyball, young children naturally reach out for interaction through babbling and facial expressions. The child's brain architecture is built when adults get in sync and respond. However, in the conditions associated with chronic poverty, the brain-building process of serve-and-return can be interrupted. For example when caregivers are depressed or severely stressed, it's much more likely that children's "serves" are overlooked, or that the back-and-forth rallies are cut short. When essential serve-and-return interactions are interrupted or missing, it weakens the architecture of the developing brain, affecting language, cognition, and more.
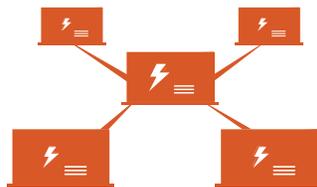
Spotty Charging Stations

Opportunities for positive child development are like charging stations. All children need chances to charge up, but the current system is built so that it provides fewer charging opportunities for some of our nation's children. Right now, powerful charging stations surround some children and families – they are connected to community centers, health care facilities and high quality child care centers. Others happen to live in charging dead zones — places where there just aren't many high-quality opportunities. We should focus on strengthening the system, so that all children and families, no matter where they are, can link into what they need to be healthy, learn, and work.

What should we do to move forward?

Solutions + Explanatory Metaphors

Connect a desired policy or promising approach to an Explanatory Metaphor introduced earlier. For instance: high-quality childcare can establish essential *Serve and Return* interactions. Supplemental income programs reduce the negative weight of parental stress from the *Resilience Scale.* Initiatives that promote greater social capital provide connections to *Charging Stations.*

Fairness Across Places

We can only succeed as a state/nation when all parts of the state/country are strong. When communities in one area are struggling, it affects us all. Moving ahead requires promoting quality programs and improving services everywhere so where we live does not determine how well we do. We need to make sure that all communities have the resources necessary to flourish and contribute to the well-being of our country.

Effectiveness Factors

Through strong evaluation science, we know what works – we can measure the "effectiveness factors" that make the difference between programs that work and those that don't work to support better outcomes for children, families, and communities. For example, in early learning settings, Without these effectiveness factors, some children can spend just as many hours in a program, but not show many positive outcomes.

Ingenuity

We need to make it a priority to tackle old problems in new ways – by developing innovative approaches. When it comes to addressing poverty in our communities, we should not limit our thinking the way our programs currently work. Instead, we should use our resources to find more creative, more effective ways to promote the health and wellbeing of our children, families and communities.