

# Building Momentum:

Laying a foundation through early childhood education

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## Importance of Early Childhood Education

Studies show that high-quality early childhood education in conjunction with positive learning experiences in the home lays a solid foundation for academic and personal success. Childcare environments that are interactive, consistent, and provided by a positive, stable caregiver have great bearing on the academic preparedness, emotional development, and social competence of a child. Creating additional opportunities for formal childcare and strengthening resources for in-home learning will give young children the greatest chance at success.

Given the importance of early childhood education, this brief seeks to highlight Native Hawaiian families and a few of their unique characteristics.

some part to the higher use of informal childcare by Hawaiian families, which includes care provided by 'ohana and family friends.

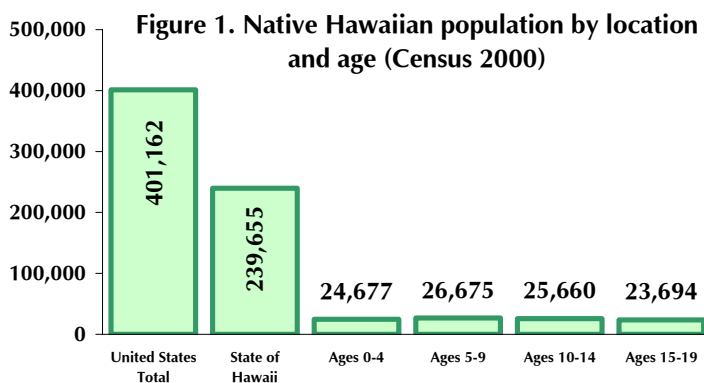
The population of young children age 0-4 will increase more than two and a half-fold by 2050. Furthermore, forecasts indicate that by 2050, Native Hawaiians age 0-5 will comprise about 12.3 percent of the Native Hawaiian population in the state, up from 10.3 percent currently. Early childhood education efforts will require additional resources and expansion to accommodate the growing population of 0-5 year-olds.

## The settings for early childhood education

In thinking of where to devote additional funding for early childhood education, decision-makers should consider the various settings in which early learning takes place. For the purposes of this brief, early learning settings are broken down into two general categories: formal or site-based settings and informal or home-based settings.

Research shows that children who attend high-quality preschool programs—even children who come from families with limited financial resources—do better in primary and secondary school than children who do not attend high-quality preschool programs. Children have a better mastery of language, cognition, interpersonal interaction, and better self-regulation when they are exposed to highly stimulating, caring environments.<sup>1</sup> Often, these environments occur in a preschool setting.

Even among “formal” childcare facilities the quality of programming and curricula varies greatly, however. Not all center-based



Data Source: Census 2000, Summary File 4

## Native Hawaiians and early childhood education

Census 2000 enumerated approximately 24,677 Native Hawaiian children ages zero to four years old. Of these children, 5,439 were enrolled in nursery or preschool. This number accounted for 47.5 percent of Native Hawaiian 3- and 4-year-olds. The percentages of Native Hawaiians attending preschool are low due in

preschools are equal in quality. Accreditation and professional certifications of facilities and programs can help families make informed decisions, though accreditation ultimately affects the cost of the program and access, especially for Native Hawaiian families.

Many Native Hawaiian families favor informal care arrangements that are provided in a home by a relative or family friend. Informal arrangements are often less expensive than center-based programs, which may explain in part why so many families prefer this option. For other families, the expense is not as much a factor as the desire for the child to be taken care of at home or with 'ohana. On the other hand, informal settings often lack the educational resources available at a center-based program. The level of academic preparedness of children who receive informal care is less easy to predict.

### **Providing options for Native Hawaiian families**

Kamehameha Schools operates 31 preschools at sites statewide serving nearly 1,500 children and their families. For children who attend a non-Kamehameha preschool, the Pauahi Keiki Scholars program provides over 700 scholarships to families to defray the cost of education. Other well-known early childhood options that incorporate Hawaiian culture into the curriculum include the 'Aha Pūnana Leo preschools, Keiki O Ka 'Āina, Keiki Steps Play Mornings (INPEACE), Pūlama I Nā Keiki (ALU LIKE), and Tūtū and Me (Partners in Development).

Kamehameha Schools also recognizes the importance of early learning even before preschool. The Hi'ilani program provides families with educational opportunities for children from prenatal to 3 years old. This program is in early developmental stages and will eventually be available in communities across the state.

Additionally, Kamehameha Schools offers home-based resources for children receiving care in informal settings. Pauahi Book Club provides free, age-appropriate books to young children in six predominantly Hawaiian communities. Families with newborn babies can also take advantage of the Birth Basket program, which provides resources that promote strong parent-child bonding, healthy lifestyle choices in support of young infants, and early literacy development. As Kamehameha Schools expands services and resources for early childhood education as outlined by the Education Strategic Plan, more resources of this type will become available.



### **Implications**

Research has documented how positive learning experiences early in life lead to positive outcomes. The work that remains has much to do with disseminating information so that families can make informed decisions, expanding the resources for early learning where ever it should take place, and making high-quality care affordable. Organizations like Kamehameha Schools and community-based partners are working to bring greater access to early childhood education for Native Hawaiians on all of these dimensions.

#### **Sources:**

1. Quality Early Education and Child Care from Birth to Kindergarten. American Academy of Pediatrics. (2005)
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