

Context:

- It cannot be stressed enough how important good preparation is *before* education can begin. Minimizing barriers to education once begun is also critical. Good preparation consists of ongoing mental, psychological and physical care of students from birth by devoted parents, caregivers, family, and communities. Good preparation consists of love, support, encouragement, hope, good nutrition, access to appropriate medical care, stable housing, and freedom from trauma.
- Half of the school-readiness gap between poor and affluent children is already evident by age 2, before most kids ever get to preschool.
- Without good preparation, children's brains do not fully develop. Without fully developed brains, education by even remarkable teachers in the finest schools is limited. This not only affects the individual student but society as a whole.
- Researchers often find that children who have had early experiences of economic scarcity and insecurity gain more from preschool programs than their more advantaged peers.
- Assuming students receive adequate preparation prior to starting school, schools also matter. There is a major lack of understanding about how great the differences are between Chicago Public Schools and Hinsdale schools, for example.

Criteria Fit: A properly selected education project could certainly fit all our criteria (proper scale, multifaceted, good fit for our congregation, attractive to our community, measurable outcomes, transformative)

Sample ideas:

- 1) Work to expand "mother/child" programs throughout the Chicago region. (As children engage and grow in a classroom setting, mothers meet with a group facilitator to hone their parenting skills.)
- 2) Develop family-based educational support programs in conjunction with other churches, local hospitals, health and education professionals.
- 3) Partner with a school to provide tutoring/mentoring, creating a template for other churches to do the same.
- 4) Create a network of high quality, early childhood education programs in underserved communities.

Traps:

- Without careful preparation we could fail to form relationships with the communities most affected by lack of quality education and thus be perceived as outsiders, with little idea of the true dynamics involved.
- We could fall victim to the myth that minorities don't value education. All parents want quality education for their children.
- We could fall victim to the myth that teachers are baby-sitters rather than educators (especially preschool teachers).
 - Preschool teacher salaries- average of \$14 an hour (UCECP pays \$16).

Possible impacts: Carefully developing the scale of our work would be important, but the payoff could be great.

- Fiscally speaking, Nobel Prize laureate and University of Chicago economics professor James Heckman showed that every \$1 spent on quality early childhood education returns \$12 to society.
- Following sample idea 1) above – If, over the course of 15 years, we could create 100 new mother/child programs, we could directly impact the educational preparedness and parenting skills for 800 families a year.
- Following sample idea 2) above – This style of project can have a wide array of impacts including responsible use of technology, increased access to school supplies, sports programs/equipment or cultural experiences as well as helping parents to more effectively advocate for their children's education. This also may take the form of providing affordable child care.
- Following sample idea 3) above – For each partner school, we can provide substantive support to 500 students per year.
- Following sample idea 4) above – By creating 10 high quality early childhood education programs in underserved neighborhoods, we could dramatically improve the educational prospects of 1000 children per year.

Connections with other areas/issues:

- Education overlaps significantly with homelessness, hunger, poverty, violence, trauma, racism and employment.