

Between birth and age five, the brain undergoes a period of aggressive growth that doesn't happen at any other point in our lives. By age 3, our brains are at 80% of their eventual adult size, and by age five, they reach 90% of their adult size.

The things that happen — or don't happen — in our first five years on earth have a huge effect on how we spend the rest of our lives.

Starting off on the right foot can affect us well into adulthood, and many of our social, emotional, and intellectual skills are developed during our first few years on the planet.

Research has shown that children who hear at least 21,000 words a day show marked improvements in their academic success all through primary school and even into high school.

But children in low-income areas tend to hear fewer words per day, which puts them well behind their peers when they reach school age. In fact, ReadyNation¹, a bipartisan, business-led initiative to further early childhood development policies, says that children without quality childhood education can arrive at kindergarten as far as 18 months behind their peers. And the resources we spend in a desperate attempt to get those children caught up are often spent in vain.

That's why any sensible effort to improve the long-term prospects of Chattanooga must include a major emphasis on early childhood education.

Many other cities are making significant inroads in this area, and there's no reason why Chattanooga can't take the lead in giving its children a head start.

For example, officials in Birmingham² have launched a pilot program that introduces "talk pedometers" into homes. These small devices count how many words are said around children so that parents can ensure their child hits the 21,000 word benchmark. Take a look at it for yourself at <https://bhmtalks.org/>.

Another example of innovative thinking in early childhood education lies on the economic side of things. Not every family can afford early childhood care. When we introduce sliding scale fees, transportation vouchers, and more flexible early childhood education hours for night shift workers, we make it possible for every child to get ahead. Take a look at [St. Mark in Kansas City](#), which does a good job of making quality early childhood education available to as many people as possible.

Beyond programs themselves, there's an argument that without knowledge of or access to the programs, many children will miss out. There's no reason a city like Chattanooga, which has

¹ <http://readynation.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/ReadyNation-Vital-Links-no-endnotes1.pdf>

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<https://www.al.com/news/2019/09/birmingham-receives-grant-for-talk-based-early-childhood-learning-program.html>

leaned heavily on technology for its success, can't make it easy for parents to access education resources and application forms.

An especially compelling example is that of Harvard University's Center on the Developing Child's initiative, Urban Thinkscape. Urban Thinkscape seeks to intertwine public spaces with opportunities to learn. While waiting for a bus, children are challenged by innovative puzzles built into the bench they're sitting on. This project needs collaboration from public servants, psychologists, urban planners, and architects to make our public spaces into an engaging, exciting, and interactive place for children to learn. Most of our children's outside time dedicated to learning is at their school. But bringing that into the real world would give children more opportunities to develop rational and mathematical skills while transforming our public outdoor spaces. Take a look at the Harvard's study here:

<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/innovation-application/innovation-in-action/urban-thinkscape/>

As the Gig City, Chattanoogaans successfully worked together to market ourselves as a forward thinking, technology driven community. We are known the world over as the first city in the western hemisphere to launch gigabit internet.

What if we also won renown for wise and strategic investments in our children? Our friends? Our neighbors?

When our children are given the best start we can offer, we all win. We win better quality of life, a better workforce, and fewer societal problems.

As mayor, Tim will leverage proven innovations to help our children succeed.