

Early childhood education pays off

On June 30, Pennsylvania finalized its fiscal 2013 budget. The budget process was challenging for the governor and the Legislature as it required very difficult decisions about allocating scarce state funding resources amid rising demand for services.

As business leaders, we understand the importance of balancing short-term needs versus longer-term investments, a process that requires careful analysis and good judgment. That's why we were particularly pleased that the final budget largely maintained a commitment to investing in early childhood education.

It's a good time to examine why the state's commitment will pay meaningful dividends and why quality early childhood education is an example of an investment that reaps economic benefits while reducing costs.

Solid research supports both the benefits of investing in quality early childhood education as well as the costs to society if we don't invest. By age 5, children's brains have developed more than 90 percent of the foundation for problem-solving, communications, critical thinking, and teamwork. If kids enter school falling behind and still lack literacy and language skills by third grade, chances are that they will never catch up.

Every industry requires employees equipped with the basic skills instilled in early childhood. For instance, the ability to solve problems is fundamental to the accounting profession, as we help clients navigate the complexities of taxes, IT implementation, audits, and other issues.

This year's budget will maintain Pennsylvania's strong system of quality early childhood programs, including Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts, Keystone STARS, Child Care Works, Nurse-Family Partnership, Parent-Child Home Program and Head Start Supplemental.

Data show that children from such programs are less likely to be retained a grade in school or need special education. They're more likely to graduate from high school, pursue higher education or job training, and earn higher lifetime salaries. They are also less likely to en-



Guest Notebook

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gage in substance abuse and crime, or to need public aid.

Investing in quality early childhood education pays huge dividends through lower costs for prisons, courts, and welfare, with the addition of more productive, tax-paying citizens. According to Arthur J. Rolnick, senior vice president and director of research at the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, every dollar invested saves \$16 in the long run on lower costs for remedial education, crime, and welfare.

The governor and Legislature knew that short-term budget pressures should not force us to take our eyes off of the future. Many businesses have survived because executives weighed the impact of their decisions and investments on the company's ongoing vitality.

Investing tax dollars wisely requires the same long view. Smart investments to ensure quality early childhood education for more children can slow the vicious cycle of poverty, lack of education, and crime.

We have visited top-rated, enriching prekindergarten classrooms and seen the professionals who teach there. We've witnessed their dedication to promoting children's healthy development in settings where outcomes are monitored and measured.

We should all be proud that Pennsylvania has been a leader in investing in early childhood education and it's gratifying to know we will remain so.

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