

# Early education benefits economy, quality of life in Pennsylvania

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## Ed Donley, the former chairman of Air Products and Chemicals, Inc.

Many [Pennsylvania](#) communities are searching for a comprehensive long-term plan to improve their local economy and their quality of life. Business leaders and law enforcement agree that investing in the state's early childhood education programs, such as Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts, Head Start (state supplemental funds), Keystone STARS, Child Care Works, Early Intervention and Nurse-Family Partnership, is a highly effective and cost-efficient strategy to set many communities on a more prosperous path.

Early childhood education is making an immediate impact on our economic recovery:

A recent Cornell study shows that for every dollar Pennsylvania invests in early childhood programs, more than \$2 is circulated throughout our local economies through employment and purchasing of goods and services. In [Lehigh County](#), more than \$51 million was circulated into the economy thanks to the state's investment in early childhood education programs in 2007-2008.

Early childhood education is keeping parents working. Parents with access to child care assistance like Child Care Works are up to 15 percent more likely to be employed and stay off public assistance. In Lehigh County, approximately 2,600 children receive Child Care Works subsidy each month, with 937 eligible children on waiting lists in April.

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Early childhood education is helping at-risk families steer clear of the pitfalls of violence and crime. At-risk families who participate in nurse home-visiting programs like the Nurse-Family Partnership are dramatically less likely to abuse their children and less likely to commit other violent crimes when compared to those similar families who do not have access to the program.

Today's investments in quality early childhood education greatly increase our children's chances of school and career success and help them avoid the pitfalls of delinquency and crime:

Children who participate in quality early education programs are more likely to enter kindergarten with age-appropriate skills. Nearly every child (99 percent) showed age-appropriate or emerging age-appropriate proficiency in literacy, numeracy and social skills after attending the PA Pre-K Counts program in 2008-2009.

Lehigh County children, who are at moderate to high risk of school failure due to factors such as living in a low-income family or their parents' low education level, benefit even more from quality early childhood education. Studies show that at-risk children can make significant developmental progress and catch up to their peers before kindergarten when they participate in these programs.

Because they enter school ready to learn, children who participate in quality early education programs do better in school, are more likely to graduate high school, attend college or job training programs, have higher earnings and own a home.

Evidence from two long-term evaluations show that participating in high-quality pre-K increases high school graduation rates by as much as 44 percent.

This is also important to law enforcement because high school dropouts are three-and-a-half times more likely than high school graduates to be arrested, and more than eight times as likely to be incarcerated. U.S. Department of Justice statistics show that 68 percent of state prison inmates do not hold a high school diploma.

When our children succeed, we all benefit. Every \$1 spent on high quality early education saves \$7 in reduced future expenditures for special education, delinquency, crime control, welfare and lost taxes. The long term return on investment for quality early education far exceeds historical returns from the stock market, with most benefits being public benefits.

The decisions that we make for our commonwealth today will become our children's legacy. The preschool children of today are the workers of the future that will help drive our economic success. The United States must compete in the global economy and we need a well-educated work force to succeed in word markets. The investment we make in young children today will pay huge dividends in the future for the state's businesses.

We urge our state legislators and Gov. Rendell to invest in early childhood education programs so we can provide our young children with the tools they will need to build all of us a brighter future.

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