

Early learning boosts health, reduce costs

Published on June 27, 2015



As owner and chair of the board at Gertrude Hawk Chocolates, and as a member of Pennsylvania's Early Learning Investment Commission (ELIC), I write today to express my strong support for Governor Tom Wolf's proposed increased investment in high-quality early learning programs.

ELIC is a group of 75 business leaders who know that effectively educating children from birth to age 5 is the key to growing a future talented workforce and thus a strong economy.

In fact, my fellow ELIC member, Denise Cesare, former President & CEO of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Northeastern PA, recently shared with me how early learning can save employers and individuals money in health care costs.

Health care costs have ballooned to \$3.8 Trillion, and that \$576 Billion is paid by U.S. businesses. Employers cover costs of health insurance premium expenditures, workman's compensation, and disability, among others.

Treatment for chronic diseases such as hypertension, heart disease, diabetes, and obesity may account for over 75% of these costs.

So prevention of chronic disease, especially related to increasing rates of obesity, has the potential to produce significant cost savings to both individuals and employers.

I find it very exciting that there is now evidence showing quality early childhood programs can be used to prevent chronic disease, thus increasing employee productivity and potentially reducing health spending.

Research shows that adults who participated in quality early learning programs as children had significantly lower risk factors for heart disease, stroke, and diabetes as adults in their 30s.

Children, especially children living in poverty, face a variety of serious health risks: obesity, malnutrition, exposure to violence in and outside of the home, and toxic stress.

Early care and education can improve children's health both directly in the short-term and indirectly in the long-term by providing access to health services like vaccinations, dental screenings, and psychological interventions, as well as by providing nutritional meals.

Programs focused on parenting can also significantly benefit children's physical and mental health as well as their overall development.

To that end, we must rally to support Governor Tom Wolf's proposed investment in quality early learning programs, which would serve an additional 14,000 children throughout the state who need it the most.

Please join me in telling our state legislators to support this increase in this year's state budget and to keep this issue at the forefront of their legislative agenda.