

My Turn: Quality early learning is in best interest

Mary Ellen Jansen | Posted: Tuesday, August 18, 2015 4:37 pm

As a financial services representative my goal is to help individuals, families and businesses build financial freedom, protect their most valued assets, and secure peace of mind, no matter what surprises life has in store. And as a resident of the greater Susquehanna Valley, I also look for smart ways for our community to make investments in order to strengthen our local economy and workforce, benefitting us all down the road.

If I told you about a potential investment opportunity proven to reap at least \$7 for every dollar invested, wouldn't you agree that the greater Susquehanna Valley should seize it? This investment would yield impressive long-term returns in the form of increased earnings and income taxes, reduced special education and welfare costs, and enormous savings in reduced crime.

So what is this investment opportunity? High-quality early childhood education.

Decades of research show these programs are the key to helping children achieve school readiness, which in turn helps them meet critical educational benchmarks that lead to their graduating high school, joining the workforce, and becoming an overall productive member of society. More recent data shows that quality early learning programs even help to improve health outcomes as adults.

While children who participate in these programs certainly have better lives because of them, providing adequate access to quality early learning also ensures a stronger, more vibrant economy for the rest of us — even in the short-term. According to America's Edge, for every \$1 invested in early care and education in Pennsylvania, an additional \$1.06 is generated for a total of \$2.06 in new spending in the state. In fact, investments in quality early learning generate more new spending for local businesses than investments in eight other major economic sectors, including transportation, construction, wholesale trade, retail trade and manufacturing.

That is why I am not surprised there is widespread bipartisan support for increased investment in high-quality early learning programs in this year's state budget. Both Gov. Tom Wolf and house and senate Republicans have proposed significant increases for these programs — \$120 million and \$30 million, respectively.

Such an increased investment would help many additional at-risk children gain access to services and curricula critical for developing into healthy, responsible workers of tomorrow.

Close to 65 percent of our young people will stay right here in the greater Susquehanna Valley and become part of our future workforce and community. It is in all of our best interests to provide them with a quality early childhood education.

Mary Ellen Jansen sits on our Early Learning Investment Committee of the Greater Susquehanna Valley United Way. She is a financial advisor with MetLife and an avid volunteer in the region.