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Published: June 29, 2016

Early childhood education is the smartest investment we can make



Did you know that a study showed adults who received high-quality early childhood education as children were more than 50% more likely to have a savings account by age 40 than those who didn't? Or that significantly more adults who attended high-quality pre-kindergarten programs own homes and second cars by age 27, graduate from high school and stay out of jail?

Statistics like this emphasize the importance of providing high quality educational opportunities to all of our young children, particularly those who are at risk of school failure. Unfortunately in York County, almost 17% of children are living under 100% of the federal poverty level (\$24,300 for a family of four), and nearly 57% are considered economically at-risk.

What if I told you that our state has been offered an investment opportunity proven to reap at least \$7 for every dollar invested? The investment would yield impressive long-term returns to Pennsylvania 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.

Approximately 90% of the human brain is developed by age five. Research shows that character skills such as teamwork, leadership, critical thinking, and self-discipline begin to develop shortly after birth, with ages 3 to 5 being a window of opportunity for the most dramatic growth. Research also confirms that the brain is particularly receptive to learning science, technology, engineering, and math between the ages of 1 and 4.

Quality early learning programs play a key role in developing both character and STEM skills, as the child has the opportunity to interact with peers and authority figures, as well as to nurture their scientifically inquisitive natures (young children ask an average of 76 questions per hour). These skills help children to become responsible citizens who are marketable and attractive to employers.

Without a quality early childhood education, not only will many of York County's children struggle in school and fail to graduate, but they will likely make bad life decisions that lead to crime, teen pregnancy, and dependence on government programs. All of these actions will only continue the vicious cycle of poverty.

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To help fight the cycle, Governor Tom Wolf has proposed increased funding for early learning programs for at-risk children in this year's budget. His proposal would boost access to quality pre-kindergarten for an additional 8,000 children; foster healthy development for 1,900 more infants and toddlers through evidence-based home-visiting programs; and allow 2,300 additional children to access child care, helping their parents to get back to work.

To that end, please join me in telling our state legislators to support Governor Wolf's proposed increase for these programs and to keep this issue in mind as they plan for future budgets.

Close to 65% of our young people will stay in York County and become part of our future workforce. When our children succeed, York County will thrive.

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