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Home –visiting programs vital



Company, we employ over 250 employees in Blair County. As such, we possess a large stake in making our region a great place to live, work, and raise a family.

And something I know would provide our community with a bright future is helping first-time, at-risk parents learn the skills they need to raise healthy children who have more opportunities to succeed.

85% of the brain is developed by age three. And while many children are fortunate enough to be born into loving, financially secure households, about 73% of Blair County children are born into economically at-risk households, and a significant portion of those children are also born to young single mothers with less than a high school education.

Obviously these children are not born with the same opportunities as children from more affluent families. Research shows that the average three year-old from a low-income family demonstrates an active vocabulary of about 500 words, while the average three year-old from a professional family demonstrates an active vocabulary of over 1000 words. And this disparity only increases as children grow older.

However, home-visiting programs like Early Head Start, Healthy Families America, Parents as Teachers, and Nurse Family Partnership provide support to low-income families to promote healthy pregnancies, enhance the development and early literacy of young children, and promote healthy family functioning.

Studies of various home-visiting programs have shown positive impacts on children's cognitive development and behavior, higher grade point averages and achievement scores at age 9, and higher graduation rates from high school. A study conducted on the Healthy Families New York program found that, in first grade, children who participated in the program were nearly twice as likely as other at-risk children to be able to follow directions, complete work on time, or work cooperatively with others.

However, funding for home-visiting programs has not been increased to keep up with inflation, nor to serve more children, in too many years.

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That is why I support Governor Wolf's proposed increased funding for home-visiting programs in this year's state budget. His proposed increase will help more than 1,900 additional at-risk children get a good start and succeed later on in life – thus strengthening the workforce, the tax base, and the future economy.

About 65% of children born in Blair County will stay right here when they become adults. I urge you to ask your state legislators to support home-visiting programs in this year's state budget to help more of these children become contributing members of society who continue to make our region a great place to live.

Dan Hoover is President & CEO of Roaring Spring Blank Book Company. He also serves as a member of Pennsylvania's Early Learning Investment Commission.