

# Work-force development begins in prekindergarten

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**Opinion - Editorial Columns**

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At a recent luncheon Sen. Jake Corman didn't mince words: "Yes, the budget debate is heated and at times downright unpleasant."

"Cuts or taxes" makes for a bad day at the office. Already bearing the burden as a state with one of the highest corporate net income tax rates in the U.S., Pennsylvania must wrestle with where its priorities lie in the face of federal stimulus funds that will disappear next year and a worse than projected decline in revenues.

How do we reshape government in order to be responsive to the people of the commonwealth who rely on entitlement programs such as Medicaid and still retain funding for important early education programs that have a proven track record?

One of the ways is to look at how we spend our money and what kind of return that investment yields. If Pennsylvania is to ever turn a corner on declining revenues, it must be able to generate and sustain not only jobs but a qualified work force in order to fill those positions.

As a small-business owner, the most critical challenge we face is finding and retaining excellent employees. The resources required in this process are a major part of our budget, as it should be; without these folks, we would not exist. The biggest challenge for many of our employees is finding good quality early-education programs that allow them to go to work each day with full concentration on their jobs.

When the state invests in early childhood education programs such as PA Pre-K Counts, Keystone STARS, Early Intervention, Head Start, Nurse-Family Partnership and Parent-Child Home Program, the state helps to build a competent work force. Families with access to child-care assistance like Child Care Works are up to 15 percent more likely to be employed, be more productive at work, stay off welfare and have higher earnings.

James Heckman, Nobel laureate in economics, states: "As a society, we cannot afford to postpone investing in children until they become adults, nor can we wait until they reach school age — a time when it may be too late to intervene. Because learning is a dynamic process, it is most effective when it begins at a young age and continues through adulthood. The returns to human capital investments are greatest for the young

for two reasons: Skill begets skill and younger persons have a longer horizon over which to recoup the fruits of their investments.”

Pennsylvania's economic success depends on the education of our children. Consider that 70 percent of jobs created in the next 10 years will require a college degree or some education beyond high school.

The unemployment rate for Pennsylvanians without a college degree is four times higher than for workers who graduated from college. A high school graduate will earn 37 percent more in a lifetime than a high school dropout. A Pennsylvanian with a bachelor's degree will earn twice as much in a lifetime as a person who only has a high school diploma.

Where does work-force development begin? It begins in early-childhood education.

Tell your legislators to make good quality early education a priority for Pennsylvania, that you care about your community and you care about kids.

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