

Increased support for quality early childcare and education establishes a foundation for our future

To The Herald-Whig:

Increased support for quality early childcare and education is one of the best investments we can make to provide an immediate economic stimulus while laying the foundation for a stronger economy.

First, investing in early childcare and education creates new jobs and generates additional spending on Main Street. Currently, more than 50,000 full-time workers are employed in early care and education across Illinois — more than the number of employees in the hotel industry. These employees, through their spending, support an additional 12,500 jobs. Their spending generates more than \$2 billion in economic activity every year.

Research from the national business group America's Edge shows that for each new dollar we invest in early childhood programs, \$2 will be generated through new spending on goods and services. Additionally, every four new jobs created in the early care and education sectors supports another job in our local communities.

Second, expanding quality early care and education programs helps parents work and attracts skilled employees to our communities. The parents of over 600,000 Illinois children under the age of six are in the workforce. Access to quality programs helps the parents of young children be productive employees by reducing absenteeism and turnover. We also know that the availability of quality care and education are key factors in attracting skilled individ-

uals to our communities.

Third, early learning programs are the key to building a productive workforce for the future. Research shows that children who participate in quality early learning programs are more likely to start kindergarten well prepared and have success in later grades, scoring higher on math and reading achievement tests. Early education also helps lower the dropout rate, which is so detrimental to building a skilled and educated workforce.

Fourth, these programs save us all money. A long-term study of children who attended Michigan's Perry Preschool program found that enrolling children in the program produced significant savings, \$16 for every dollar spent.

As Gov. Quinn and the General Assembly make funding decisions, it's important to note that cutting early child care and education programs would be short-sighted and bad business for our state. As a member of the business leader organization of America's Edge, I urge the legislature to remove the sunset provision on the state's "Preschool for All" program, fully restore state preschool funding, and maintain the state's commitment to child care assistance for working families.

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