

# LOCAL LIFE

## Business leaders urge support of early education programs

### From America's Edge

Two Montana business leaders met Tuesday, June 14, with the state's Congressional delegation to stress the importance of high-quality early care and education to the future of Montana's business community.

Ken Holmlund, who owns Holmlund Mobile Lock and Key in Miles City, and Ron Schafer, managing member of the Schafer and Company accounting firm in Bozeman, met separately with Sen. Jon Tester and Rep. Denny Rehberg as well as the staff of Sen. Max Baucus. The veteran business leaders urged continued federal support for early care and education programs, which could face severe cuts in next year's federal budget. Holmlund has owned his firm for 28 years, and Schafer has run his firm for 14 years.

In their meetings yesterday on Capitol Hill, Holmlund and Schafer noted that investments in early care and education provide strong economic benefits to businesses in the state, both in the short-term and over the long-term.

A recent study by Ameri-

ca's Edge, a national business leaders group, found that quality early care and education programs in Montana generated \$1.61 in total spending for every dollar invested — more than investments in other sectors, such as transportation, construction, and farming, forestry, fishing and hunting.

"Funding early care and education actually generates more sales of local goods and services for in-state businesses than investments in many other economic sectors," said Holmlund, "For every dollar cut, we stand to lose just as much economic activity. That would be a loss for many Main Street businesses in our state."

The business leaders also noted the long-term benefits of investing in early care and education. One study found that for every dollar invested in quality early care and education programs, as much as \$16 could be saved by helping at-risk youth grow up to become better educated and more productive adults, and avoid costly remedial education and criminal activity.

Research has shown that children who attend quality early learning programs can

score better in elementary school testing, require less special education, need less grade retention and graduate at a higher rate than peers who do not attend. Most important to businesses, Schafer said, was the higher rate of employment that students who attend quality early education attain down the road.

"We've got to start early if kids are going to enter school ready to succeed and ultimately graduate," he said. "These high-quality early education programs prepare youngsters not only for success in school, but later in life."

Early education, the business leaders said, does more than prepare children for training in the hard academic skills like mathematics, reading and writing. The same skills that early education has been shown to nurture — the ability to communicate, collaborate, and critically think — are the ones that many employers report are hard to find. Sixty percent of new jobs created early in the 21st century will require skills that only 20 percent of the current American work-

force has.

Holmlund and Schafer asked Senators Baucus and Tester and Rep. Rehberg to prioritize and protect access for early care and education programs. They specifically asked Sen. Tester, a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, and Rep. Rehberg, the chairman of a key House appropriations subcommittee, to work to maintain enrollment for federal early education programs like Head Start, Early Head Start and the Child Care and Development Block Grant at their current levels.

"I run a small business, so I know how important a balanced budget is," said Holmlund. "Every dollar we spend is spent on what we know will work. Few things make as much sense for our kids' future and for businesses' bottom lines as investment in high-quality early care and education. It's just good business sense."

To view the "America's Edge" report on Montana, go to [www.americasedge.org](http://www.americasedge.org).

Holmlund and Schafer are members of America's Edge, a national business leaders organization with 500 members nationwide.