

# PortlandTribune

**Readers' Letters:**

## **Give kids an early, strong start**

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Quality early learning programs not only lower crime rates but also have a considerable impact on our state's businesses and economy (Quality preschool will reduce future crime rates, Dec. 12).

As a businessman, I know education is vital to creating a qualified workforce. Oregon students must be ready for college and career when they graduate. Unfortunately, we are not getting the job done, despite our state's laudable goals.

The Oregon Education Investment Board's "40-40-20 goal" seeks to make sure that by 2025 every Oregonian has achieved at least a high school diploma, 40 percent have earned a postsecondary degree and 40 percent have obtained a bachelor's degree or higher. Implementing this goal is essential. According to America's Edge, Oregon jobs requiring postsecondary education are expected to grow 40 percent faster than jobs for high school dropouts or graduates.

Yet, about 30 percent of Oregon high school students do not graduate on time. Among those who did graduate, only 29 percent of the class of 2012 met college readiness benchmarks on the ACT college admissions tests.

Problems begin even earlier: Only 33 percent of our eighth-graders are proficient in math and reading. Seventy percent of fourth-graders read below grade level and 63 percent are below grade level in math.

How do we change these statistics? High-quality early learning.

Children who participated in quality early care and education programs have shown increased rates of high school graduation, lower rates of enrollment in special education and higher lifetime earnings, compared to those not enrolled in such programs.

I urge our state congressional delegation to support the bipartisan legislation known as the Strong Start for America's Children Act, which would establish a strong state-federal partnership for Oregon to expand and strengthen its quality preschool programs.

**Michael Harper**