



GUEST COLUMNIST

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Investing in Early Childhood Education Is Good Business



Employers throughout Fairfax County recognize that a high quality K-12 educational system is key to the continued economic strength of our community. What many may not know is that 85-90 percent of

a child's social, emotional and intellectual foundation is already in place by age five, the year that most children are just entering kindergarten.

Brain research indicates that children's early learning experiences from birth to age five have a strong impact on their ability to enter school ready to succeed and also increase the likelihood that they will go on to graduate from high school, commit fewer crimes, and become productive members of the community. When young children enter kindergarten excited about learning and able to cooperate with the teacher and their peers, they are well prepared to be successful in school and ultimately become the skilled, flexible workforce essential to maintain a strong economy.

According to research by Art Rolnick of the Federal Reserve Bank of Minnesota and Nobel Laureate James Heckman, investing in quality early childhood education is also a sound economic development strategy with a higher projected return on investment to the region than traditional economic development projects, such as building a sports stadium. Studies have shown a return of \$1-\$17 for every dollar invested in quality early childhood education programs, an enviable rate

by any standards.

Employers know that when their employees' young children are in quality childcare and preschool programs, employees can focus more fully on their work and are more productive on the job. Businesses also know that today's youngest children will be the workforce of the future and are the key to future economic success.

As a result, government and the private sector share a strong interest in the school readiness of today's youngest children. The issue continues to gain local, regional and national attention. Local chambers including the Greater Springfield Chamber of Commerce, as well as the U.S. Chamber, the National Association of Manufacturers and the Business Roundtable, are beginning to focus on the issue and are becoming strong advocates.

Virginia Governor Tim Kaine has made access to quality pre-kindergarten education a priority of his administration as has the current Obama administration. In Fairfax County, investment in quality early childhood education is a vital first step to ensure a pipeline of well prepared students with the skills needed to sustain our economic engine for years to come.

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