

BANGOR DAILY NEWS

March 12 Letters to the Editor

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Invest early, often

As a businessman, I view investments I make today in my company and my employees as tools that will strengthen and sustain my business and the quality of service we provide our customers for many years into the future.

When it comes to public investments in programs that can help Maine students increase graduation rates, policy makers should take the same long-term look at what works.

High-quality early education pays great dividends for the future.

Children who attend high-quality early education programs start school ready to learn, are retained less often, need less special education services and are more likely to graduate high school on time.

In fact, Henry Levin, a researcher at Columbia University, found that high-quality pre-kindergarten programs are the most proven tools for improving graduation rates.

As legislators and our members of Congress focus on how to increase graduation rates, they should ensure that early education programs are well-funded and available to serve more Maine children. Currently, only 41 percent of Maine's 4-year-olds and only 17 percent of Maine's 3-year-olds are enrolled in state pre-K programs, Head Start, or early childhood special education programs.

Funding for Head Start, Early Head Start, Child Care Development Block Grants and state pre-K should be expanded to include more Maine youngsters into the highest quality programs. Then we will see our return on investment produce increased graduation rates in the next decade.

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