



*A student in a Head Start class in Washington County gets a push in a special swing designed to promote security. Such pre-K programs are too important to not fund fully, a reader says. (2003 Press Herald file)*

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*Letters to the Editor*

### **Preschool programs shouldn't be shortchanged**

It is encouraging to hear policy makers in Augusta and Washington turning much-needed attention to raising graduation rates. These discussions should also include the positive impact that high-quality early education has on high school success.

Columbia University researcher Henry Levin found one of the most effective tools for improving graduation rates is high-quality pre-kindergarten programs. In fact, pre-kindergarten is the most widely implemented school reform that produces solid graduation-rate increases.

In Maine, 83 percent of our 3-year-olds and 59 percent of our 4-year-olds are not enrolled in state pre-K programs, Head Start or early childhood special education programs.

Statewide, funding for Head Start, the nation's premier pre-kindergarten program for economically disadvantaged children, only serves 66 percent of eligible children. Clearly, we have a

large early education need among Maine's youngest citizens.

I recently heard Rob Grunewald, an economist with the Federal Reserve Bank, tell a group of Maine business leaders that investments in pre-kindergarten programs have a return of greater than 17 percent. These figures include future public savings on special education, corrections and welfare.

As a banker, I agree with Mr. Grunewald's assessment that something of this value would not sit on the private market very long. It would be quickly invested.

Similarly, policy makers in Congress should invest more in Childcare Development Block Grants, Head Start and Early Head Start. In Maine, our congressional representatives should be encouraged to make greater investments in pre-K.

These are proven methods of increasing future graduation rates.

*Bob Davis*

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*Harpwell*