

Williams: Investments in learning pay off for biz, state

Cynthia Williams
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As Sen. Debbie Stabenow and the Senate Budget Committee look for the best possible investments to help jump-start our economy, I have a suggestion:

Consider early learning programs.

New research from the business leader group America's Edge shows that investments in quality early learning are among the most effective ways to infuse billions of dollars into local and state economies, while creating tens of thousands of jobs and building a foundation for sustained economic security.

America's Edge research confirms that, across the state, we can generate nearly \$2 for every \$1 invested in quality early learning. That increased spending, in turn, creates jobs.

The America's Edge research also shows that investment in early learning will save Michigan's businesses millions of dollars lost every year because of absenteeism related to employees' child care problems. On average, parents miss up to two weeks of work every year to deal with child care arrangements. Not only will access to child care reduce the costs of absenteeism, it has also been proven to increase employee productivity - again, a big boost to Michigan businesses' bottom lines on both sides of the balance sheet.

A quality early care and education system that will bolster our ability to keep and attract skilled employees today will also ensure a future work force armed with the 21st century hard skills Michigan businesses will need. A lack of these skills is costing U.S. businesses in excess of \$3.7 billion every year for remedial education services for their own employees.

Equally important are the soft skills - the ability to be communicators, collaborators and critical thinkers. In the years ahead, as Baby Boomers retire and the workforce shrinks, we must ensure that we have a

pipeline of well-educated workers with the knowledge, skills and abilities that are key to Michigan businesses maintaining our competitive edge.

The long-term return on investments in early learning programs is one that cannot be matched by almost any other public investment - up to \$16 for every \$1 invested.

Stabenow, D-Lansing, has always been a true leader for children. As a business leader, I will work to support her efforts, as a key member of the Senate Budget Committee, to prioritize in the federal investments in early learning, including Head Start, Early Head Start and the Child Care and Development Block Grant, as a significant way to revitalize Michigan businesses and our state's economy.

Cynthia Williams is Executive Director of the Michigan Education Special Services Association in East Lansing, MI, and a member of America's Edge.