

The Herald-News

We all benefit from preschools

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By: Monica Barichello

Times are tough for all of us. Purse strings from our state and local governments are torn and frayed as never before. Every day, we read about local programs that are facing cuts or worse -- closing. Our state leaders are confronted with some difficult decisions and no easy choices are left. As a member of the business community, I urge them not to weaken Main Street by cutting investments to early education.

Illinois has led the country in supporting quality preschool with our Preschool for All program. More than 2,000 children in Will County are now enrolled in Preschool for All. Now is not the time to go back on that progress because it will hurt our state's businesses in the short- and long-term.

A recent report by America's Edge, a group of business leaders who want to strengthen the economy through proven investments in children, points to new evidence that investments in early learning are a double-your-money venture. This economic boost is similar to other shovel-ready industries like construction, manufacturing and transportation. Early care and education

workers spend money to operate their centers, in addition to spending their paychecks on local goods and services. If we cut funding to this vital part of our local economy, research shows we are sure to see the reverse effect.

Here in Illinois, the early care and education field employs 56,000 full-time workers, which is more than the hotel industry. For every four jobs created in the early learning sector, another job is created outside that sector in Illinois' economy.

If we cut jobs in this field, we are affecting other parts of the economy.

Giving our young children the boost they need to succeed in school ensures that businesses do not have to spend unnecessarily on remedial lessons in reading, writing, and math. Businesses across the United States spend \$3.7 billion on such lessons.

Preschool is a critical time for kids to gain many of the soft skills that we need in business -- communicating, collaborating

and thinking critically, while laying the foundation for skills in math, reading and writing.

Adoption of the current budget proposal under discussion in Springfield would cut preschool by 24 percent over the next two years. The budget proposal also does not include full support for the child care assistance program for working families. In Will County, about 500 kids would be cut loose from preschool and local businesses will lose sales. Main Street is hurting already. Let's not make it worse.

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