



## The Chamber Courier

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### Message from the Executive Director

On July 19, the Chamber hosted a meeting to introduce our members to *America's Edge*, a national non-profit organization of business leaders, including myself and many others in Illinois and here in Canton. *America's Edge* members work to strengthen businesses and the economy through proven investments in children and youth.

*America's Edge* National Director, Susan Gates, and the organization's Illinois Policy Associate, Alena Chaps, made a presentation outlining how investments in quality early learning programs can actually boost our local economies. In fact, *America's Edge* has issued a report, which uses data developed by Cornell University, demonstrating that funding for Illinois' "Preschool for All" program will increase sales from local businesses comparable to or higher than investments in other major economic sectors such as construction, retail trade, manufacturing, transportation and utilities. Data was also presented that jobs would be created, both within and outside of the early learning sector, through funding of early learning programs. *America's Edge* also showed that access to these programs will decrease employee absenteeism, which costs the U.S. over \$3 billion every year.

Finally, we learned that quality early care and education ensure a future workforce with the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills our businesses need. Research presented revealed that children who participate in these programs are significantly more likely to enter school with the underlying skills needed for success in school and later in the workforce. Particularly important to our Chamber members was data showing that early learning programs increase rates of employment when these children are adults and build the foundation for skills such as communication, collaboration and critical thinking – something often lacking in young employees.

Even more telling was how fiscally sound investment in early learning has proven to be – as much as \$16 for every dollar invested. That is a rate of return that would not sit on the private market for very long.

The voices of *America's Edge* Illinois members were heard this year as evidenced by the Governor's decision not to cut funding for Preschool for All and to make the program permanent.

As a result of the presentation, many of our Chamber members joined *America's Edge*. There is no charge to be a member, participation is voluntary, and the *America's Edge* staff works with us to strategically use our voices, while taking a minimal amount of our time.

I look forward to working with the other Illinois business leaders of *America's Edge* to support programs and policies that are one of the most effective ways to revitalize our local economy, while building a strong foundation for long-term economic security. I am not sure if the benefits of early childhood education always have been understood by the business community. But now that we understand, I consider it a call to action to support these programs that benefit our businesses' bottom lines.

If you would like to learn more about *America's Edge*, please feel free to contact me, visit [www.americasedge.org](http://www.americasedge.org), or contact Alena Chaps at [achaps@americasedge.org](mailto:achaps@americasedge.org) or at (312) 288-8229.