



Invest in early-learning programs

By: Jeff Cribbs

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As we begin to see jobs return to Illinois' economy, the article "**Slow, specialized hiring for many employers, but many jobs gone for good**" (March 13) is a reminder that there is still a long way to go before job growth is back to pre-recession rates. While businesses struggle to recover so that they will be in a position to hire, I recently learned of an investment that will generate more sales of local goods and services from our Illinois businesses than any other economic sector.

According to a new report from the business leader organization America's Edge, every \$1 publicly invested in early care and education creates more than \$2 in economic activity for Illinois businesses – that's a higher return on investments than what other major sectors would generate, such as transportation, construction, wholesale trade, retail trade and manufacturing. This translates into increased sales of local goods and services and job creation throughout the state.

Investments in early-learning programs also help build a long-term foundation for future economic growth by ensuring that we have a well-prepared workforce down the line with the 21st century skills businesses need in our technology and innovation-driven world. In fact, children who participate in high quality early-learning programs are up to 44 percent more likely to graduate from high school, are 22 percent more likely to be employed and can have median earnings that are 36 percent higher as adults than those who did not participate in these valuable programs.

As Illinois businesses are still working their way out of the recession, we need to focus on state investments in quality early-learning programs because they are the only investment with both an immediate and a long-term promise for economic growth for our state. The research makes it clear that continuing these is an essential strategy for continuing Illinois' economic recovery during these difficult times.

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