

Local leaders call for more education money

REPORT SHOWS INVESTMENTS PAY OFF

By Darwin Campbell
Thursday, March 31, 2011

A group of Metro East community and business leaders is calling for additional state investments in education and early child care to help boost the economy.

"Now is the time for local communities, business leader and school officials to step up and work together to accomplish the goal of building our leaders of tomorrow," said Collinsville Mayor John Miller during a press conference last week where a new study from the business group America's Edge was released.

The report indicates that if all qualifying Illinois children were given access to quality early child care and education services at a cost of additional \$1.2 billion, the state would generate \$2.6 billion in total new spending for Illinois businesses. An estimated \$104 million would go to Madison and St. Clair counties, with 39,000 new jobs.

In addition, the research shows that children participating in quality early learning programs do better in math, reading, developing social and emotional skills; have higher graduation rates; and enter the workforce with higher skill levels and earn more as adults.

The group is advocating for expanding education programs as the economy recovers.

Gov. Paul Quinn has proposed restoration of fiscal year 2009 levels to state-funded quality early learning programs in his budget — a move

America's Edge estimates will generate an additional \$445 million in economic activity for goods and services and a total of \$825 million in economic impact statewide.

Tim Carpenter, Illinois director of America's Edge, said nearly 2,000 children in Madison County participate in state-funded Preschool for All Program and thousands of other families with working parents benefit from subsidized child care.

"Quality early learning programs in our communities is a key component to competing successfully for skilled workers and new businesses as we come out of recession," he said at a press conference last week Edwardsville.

Also in attendance were Kevin Weinacht, chairman of Collinsville Economic Development Commission; Alton Mayor Tom Hoechst; Granite City Mayor Ed Hagnauer; and Ben Schoesser, of the Leadership Council of Southwestern Illinois.

"In these difficult economic times, investments in early care and education are an essential strategy for continuing Illinois' economic recovery," said Monica Bristow, president of the business group RiverBend Growth Association. "It also shows that early learning investments create and sustain jobs. In fact, every 10 people employed in the early learning sector create and support three jobs outside of the sector. That is real economic development."