



OPINION – LETTERS

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Early education aids economy

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I spend much of my time figuring out how to boost jobs and economic development in the Collinsville area. Until recently, I can't say that 3- and 4-year-old children would have made my list. But early learning investments provide a strong boost to local businesses and build a foundation for long-term economic security.

A report from the national business leader's organization, America's Edge, shows that every \$1 invested in early care and education in Illinois will generate a total of \$2.17 in sales of local goods and services within the state. In fact, this boost to local businesses is higher than investments in other economic sectors such as transportation and manufacturing. And this "multiplier" works in reverse: For every \$1 cut from Illinois' early learning programs, \$1.17 is lost. Our local businesses cannot afford additional losses.

Communities in the metro-east area have fantastic growth potential due to our location within the St. Louis region. As our economy grows, commercial and residential developers are very selective about their site selection. A community's quality of education is among the top considerations for any developer. Illinois' early learning programs give our schools and our communities a competitive advantage.

The General Assembly is facing tough decisions about priorities in the next several weeks. It makes sense to me to focus our limited resources on programs that work, such as our state preschool program and child care assistance program. Let's at least maintain support for these programs that we know strengthen local business and our communities.