

Letter to the Editor, Philadelphia Inquirer, April 17, 2007

Prekindergarten: A smart way to fight crime

Re: "Pa. House GOP offers own school budget plan" (April 5): It is true that despite important increases in state education funding since 2003, many students still lag far behind their peers in academic achievement. Children learn more from birth to age 5 than at any subsequent stage of life. By the time they reach kindergarten or first grade, many have difficulty catching up.

Fortunately, high quality prekindergarten for 3- and 4-year olds has had proven success in narrowing the achievement gap between students who are at risk of academic failure and those who are not. In the short- and medium-term, this results in less grade retention and lower special education costs for school districts. In the long term it results in higher high-school graduation and employment rates, less reliance on public assistance and less crime.

Every dollar invested in prekindergarten saves the public \$17 over time.

This is one reason it is enthusiastically supported by educators, law enforcement officials, economists and civic leaders.

The Rendell administration has proposed adding \$75 million to next year's education budget to fund prekindergarten for 11,000 children, with an eye toward eventually making it accessible to any child whose family would like it. This may seem like a lot of money. However, elected officials who are concerned with growing public expenditures would do well to support prekindergarten now in order to avoid spending exponentially larger sums on special education, public assistance and criminal justice in the future.

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