

UNITED WAY APPLAUDS GOVERNOR'S BUDGET PROPOSAL

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If you knew how to prepare children to succeed in school, foster a generation of adults able to support themselves, build a workforce better able to meet the demands of the 21st century economy, and reduce the social costs of crime and the need for public assistance, wouldn't you act on that knowledge?

As it happens, we do know. A large and growing body of research demonstrates that children are more likely to be successful in school and throughout their lives when they have the benefit of high quality learning experiences. Such experiences foster children's intellectual, social, emotional, and physical growth during their crucial early years, when brain development is at its most rapid and intense.

A champion for early learning, United Way applauds the bold stand for early learning made by Governor Rendell in his proposed budget announced on Tuesday. The proposal includes \$75 million in new funding to provide additional pre-kindergarten to 11,000 across the state, with a focus on children most at risk for school failure. The budget would also continue funding Head Start services for another 5,800 children.

Among other early childhood development supports, the budget includes \$9 million for the Keystone STARS child care quality improvement program with a goal of reaching more children while increasing incentives for providers to participate.

Keystone STARS is part of United Way's strategy to raise the quality of early care and education centers in this region. A December 2006 independent report concluded that Keystone STARS is getting results and improving quality. To improve the lives of children and families of this region, United Way is committed to increasing the number of children benefiting from high quality early learning experiences. United Way is currently expanding its work to reach another 320 centers to improve the school readiness of an additional 20,000 children. We are also joining with leaders in the business community to educate employees about how and why to seek out high quality early learning programs.

Studies of Philadelphia school children show that while poverty and other disadvantages undermine children's abilities to do well in school; attending preschool actually has a protective effect against these risk factors. Long-term studies have shown that quality early childhood education has a positive effect on adult issues such as attending college, obtaining a better paying job and home ownership. High quality early care and education is a wise investment. Researchers have calculated returns to society as high as \$17 for every dollar spent.

The Governor's early childhood proposals would require a significant investment of public dollars but many states across the country are already funding dramatic expansions in the availability of quality preschool education. Given the significant return on investment and the challenges facing our region – 54,000 children living in poverty, 6200 new high school drop outs each year, 75,000 young people neither in school nor employed, and tens of thousands of adults ill-equipped to support themselves and their families – can we afford to do less?

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