

State would save more than \$1 billion with pre-k investment

ALBUQUERQUE — A study released by the Economic Policy Institute (EPI) shows that participation in a high-quality pre-kindergarten program provides a child – and society at large – with life-long social and economic benefits. “Enriching Children, Enriching the Nation” states that children who receive early child education are less likely to repeat a grade or require special education or child welfare services. They are less likely throughout their lifespan to engage in criminal activity and as adults they earn higher incomes.

The study projects that by the year 2050, New Mexico would save more than \$1 billion from

reduced crime if it implemented a universal pre-k program for all 3- and 4-year-olds now. And we’d see more than \$2 billion more in increased wages and benefits.

“The study reinforces what we’ve been saying for years,” said Bill Jordan, policy director for New Mexico Voices for Children. “The benefits of early childhood education are many and well worth the investment. Science tells us that more than 85 percent of brain development occurs in the first few years of life,” he added, “and yet less than one-half of one percent of our state budget is spent on these early years.”

“By contrast, over 60 percent of the state budget is spent on K-12 and higher education. One of the reasons our children fail to reach their full potential is that we’ve failed to invest in them when it is most crucial.”

Jordan likens the brain development that occurs in early childhood to the frame and foundation of a building – it is the structure upon which all future learning and development is built. But unlike a building foundation, which can be shored up later, that brain development can only occur in the first few years of life. A missed opportunity for developing this critical structure can never be recovered.

The study points out that pre-K is one of the only public programs that pays for itself in the long run and it advocates for a national pre-K program as a way to strengthen the U.S. economy by raising incomes, improving worker skills, and reducing poverty.

“High quality early childhood education isn’t just the right thing to do for our children – it’s the right investment for our state and our country,” Jordan added.

The study, written by well-known economist Robert Lynch, is available online at www.epi.org/content.cfm/book_enriching

New Mexico Voices for Children is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization advocating for policies to improve the health and well-being of New Mexico’s children, families and communities. 2340 Alamo SE, Suite 120, Albuquerque, NM 87106; 505-244-9505 (p); www.nmvoices.org

GUEST COLUMN

Pre-K program would pay for itself

ALBUQUERQUE—Fact sheets released last week by the Economic Policy Institute (EPI) show that a high-quality pre-kindergarten program would provide New Mexico with major economic benefits in as little as eight years. The fact sheets are a follow-up to the report “Enriching Children, Enriching the Nation” released by the EPI in May. The report showed that, if implemented now, a voluntary pre-K program for all 3- and 4-year-olds would save New Mexicans more than \$1 billion in reduced crime costs in the year 2050. That’s because a pre-K program sets children up for academic success, making them less likely to engage in criminal activity. Such a program would also benefit the state with \$2.2 billion in increased wages in 2050 because pre-K grads earn higher incomes as adults.

“This study is the first to look at the economic impacts of early childhood education,” said Gerry Bradley, Research Director for New Mexico Voices for Children. “The projected annual cost is less than \$200 million, which is a relatively small amount in a state budget of more than \$5 billion.”

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