

# ***Biz leaders call for early-ed funding***

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Swati Adarkar of ***Ready for School*** would like to see more young children get help.

A group of prominent business executives across the state is launching an initiative to allocate \$40 million to early childhood education.

The group, which calls itself Ready for School, is still discussing what sort of action it might take. Its goal is to expand access to early education, starting with those most in need.

It also wants to make high-quality preschool programs available to all children in Oregon who qualify for Head Start, the national preschool program started in the 1960s that has proved its effectiveness preparing poor children for school success.

Spearheaded by local research group Children's Institute, community group Innovation Partners and children's advocacy group Stand for Children, the 45-person collective has attracted some well-known business figures, including Richard Alexander, founder of door and window manufacturer Viking Industries Inc.; Gun Denhart, founder of clothing company Hanna Andersson; Ken Thrasher, a former Fred Meyer executive now leading software startup Compli Inc.; Donald Washburn, former executive vice president at Northwest Airlines; and Duncan Campbell, chair of The Campbell Group.

"Early childhood education has been stated to be the most effective economic development tool available to states," said Alexander, a member of the Ready for School steering committee. "It's time to recognize that as we are seeing more buoyancy in our economy, it's time to address this, or we will fall further behind our neighboring states and our international competitors."

The group will ask Kulongoski and legislators to allocate \$40 million in the next budget to expand Head Start or high-quality preschool programs throughout the state.

Head Start is the benchmark because research has supported its effectiveness. The program often includes guidance and help for the parents of participating children in areas such as literacy and nutrition.

Children who qualify for Head Start live under the poverty line, defined in 2006 as a family of four living on less than \$20,000 per year, less than half of Oregon's median income of between \$43,000 and \$44,000 per year.

Oregon Head Start now serves about 60 percent of children whose families qualify for the program.

"That means 6,000 eligible 3- and 4-year-olds aren't being served," said Swati Adarkar, executive director of the Portland-based Children's Institute and a member of the Ready for School steering committee.

While Ready for School's members would love to see preschool extended to all children in Oregon, said Adarkar, it's realistic to begin by focusing on the state's neediest children.

That is also where the greatest return on investment will be seen, according to a number of studies. One oft-cited report published by the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis three years ago concluded that early childhood education should be placed at the very top of state and local government economic development efforts.

The Federal Reserve piece, written by research director Art Rolnick and regional economic analyst Rob Grunewald, cites longitudinal studies showing that adults from disadvantaged backgrounds who had attended high-quality preschool programs:

graduated from high school at significantly higher rates than their peers who had not been in preschool;  
were less often held back a grade or placed in special education programs;  
had higher earnings than their peers; and  
were far less likely to have been arrested repeatedly.

"I keep telling people that we already know the outcomes," said Compli CEO Thrasher. "If kids drop out [of high school], they cost us \$8,600 more per year in services than they will provide to the state in taxes."

One study went so far as to quantify the economic benefits of high-quality preschool, finding that for every dollar invested in the program during the 1960s, more than \$8 of benefits accrued to the adults those children grew into and to society as a whole, in the form of more tax payments to government from earnings, and less use of social programs, including incarceration.

The studies cited by Rolnick and Grunewald may even understate the long-term value of high-quality preschool programs, the authors point out, since they did not cover the children of the adults whose lives were tracked.

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