

## **Early education is an investment with greatest return**

Research confirms that to build an educated workforce, reduce crime, and just make sure our kids have a chance, the best time to invest in education is when learning begins – from birth through age five. In Davidson County, the foundation for a sound, basic education begins with investing in Smart Start.

Study after study shows that young children with quality early learning opportunities are more likely to do well in school, graduate and go on to college. They are more likely to have better health outcomes and become the kind of worker that helps our community compete for jobs.

Experts say that children who lack the necessary literacy and language skills by the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade simply don't catch up. These are the children teachers predict will drop out of high school, likely ending up as unwed parents, on the streets or in jail. Unfortunately, these teacher predictions often end up true. The children pay – and we pay.

Nobel Prize-winning economist James Heckman found that investments in early childhood development produce the highest return on the dollar, compared to other investments such as higher education and job training. The older the individual, the lower the rate of return. The opportunity for the highest rate of return is with the very young. That is why we need to make the investment beginning at birth – and maintain support.

It's clear that children getting the right early childhood education will come to school more prepared than others. But a wealth of studies tracking children's activity over time also show those who have that strong early childhood education – and strong family and community support – were more likely to get married, get a better job, earn higher incomes, and take a more active role in the community.

Getting children prepared for school in today's competitive environment is essential to ensuring the future success of our community. In today's economy, budgets are shrinking and policy and decision makers are looking for creative ways to find cuts.

We must protect the investment and all of the good work that has been made in Davidson County for young children. Eliminating such a vital part of our community will not only be devastating to the children and the families that are directly impacted but to the employers that are depending on their workers to be there each day thanks to access to affordable, quality child care and to the families that expect high quality care and services. It will unravel the foundation of education that is being built in our community.