

## **McDowell County's young children are a priority**

*Submitted by: [PENDING APPROVAL]*

During this budget time in the NC Legislature, it's important that we remember North Carolina's bipartisan support for investing in early childhood education and expanding Smart Start (locally Partnership for Children of the Foothills) and NC Pre-K.

A bipartisan poll, conducted in North Carolina in the fall of 2014, found that North Carolina voters view early childhood education as a critical issue in the state. Majorities of Democrats, Republicans and Independents support investments in early childhood programs in the state – including expanding access to Smart Start, Pre-K, teacher training and home visiting programs.

More than four in five (83%) of North Carolina voters believe that investments in early childhood programs will benefit North Carolina's economy in the short and long term. Voters ranked ensuring children get a strong start as a top priority for policymakers, second only to jobs and the economy and well ahead of reducing the tax burden on families. The poll was conducted by the bipartisan team of Public Opinion Strategies and Hart Research for the First Five Years Fund and the North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation.

We believe that investing in the First 2,000 Days of a child's life — the time between when they are born and when they enter kindergarten, is critical to creating the best outcomes in education, health and economic well-being for all of McDowell County's young children and families. We know that for every dollar invested, we will see at least a \$7 return on our investment.

McDowell County has a long history of investing in young children and families (**do we want to make the connection to McDowell Smart Start?**) and we know more needs to be done. Continued investments from the state (and, locally) will mean we can continue to ensure McDowell County's young children benefit from high-quality early learning programs, which in turn creates better education, health and economic outcomes for everyone in McDowell County and in North Carolina.