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Community Voices

Investing in early care builds economy

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Investing in early care and education for children birth to 5 years is one of the most cost-effective ways to improve the San Joaquin Valley's economy, now and in the future. Early care and education programs produce important short- and long-term benefits for children, families, taxpayers and the community.

The early care and education industry is already an important community economic driver. In 2008 the early childhood education industry in Kern County contributed \$197 million to the local economy and provided direct employment to more than 9,000 people. Additionally, access to affordable child care and education programs allows parents to enter and remain in the work force. Studies also indicate that employees who have access to high-quality early education programs for their children have higher productivity rates, less absenteeism and longer job retention.

Early care and education is also a smart investment in this region's ability to compete in the national economy. According to a survey by Partnership for America's Economic Success, 54 percent of U.S. business leaders believe that finding skilled and educated workers will be a significant challenge to managing their businesses in the future. In order to ensure San Joaquin Valley's economic success, we must find ways to better prepare our work force. Research proves that children participating in high-quality preschool programs gain lifelong skills and improve their chances for future job market success.

Investing in quality early care and education programs provides long-term social and economic benefits for our community. Research shows that:

Children enrolled in a quality early care and education program are significantly less likely to commit a crime later in life.

The return on investment is high. It is estimated that taxpayers save up to \$16 for every dollar invested in future costs on special education, remedial education, teenage pregnancy and welfare payments ("Early Childhood Development with a High Public Return" by Rolnick, J., Arthur & Grunewald, Rob, 2003).

Children who participate in quality early care and education programs have higher academic achievement, salaries and employee benefits than children who do not participate in these programs.

Our children will be the future employees, consumers and leaders driving our economy. We must create and sustain the infrastructure to support their development now, to benefit children still in their formative years. Policymakers, business leaders, philanthropists and community-based organizations must ensure that investment in early care and education remains a top priority. It is an opportunity our businesses, neighborhoods and communities cannot afford to miss.

On April 29, regional and nationwide business leaders and economic experts will be convening in Fresno to discuss why early care and education is a sound and necessary economic investment. The San Joaquin Valley Regional Business Leader Summit on Early Care and Education will be an opportunity to hear from representatives from the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, AT&T California, Paramount Farms and others. Participants will learn about the long-term benefits of investing in early care and education and obtain a regional perspective of the current state of early care and education. In addition, attendees will have the opportunity to ask questions and network with other San Joaquin Valley business leaders as well as representatives from the early care and education industry. For more information contact me at the Early Childhood Council of Kern at 636-4444 or taburns@kern.org.

Tammy Burns is the coordinator for the Early Childhood Council of Kern. She also serves on the Executive Committee of the California Child Care Coordinators Association.

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