

## **Pre-K programs earning high marks**

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**Editorial by Lubbock Online:**

**[http://www.lubbockonline.com/stories/071707/edi\\_071707009.shtml](http://www.lubbockonline.com/stories/071707/edi_071707009.shtml)**

"If our American way of life fails the child, it fails us all." - Pearl S. Buck

HOW DO WE build a stronger economy, reduce crime and balance our state budget? Our elected leaders struggle with this question daily. What to do?

The latest research from the Economic Policy Institute provides a potential solution. Read on.

The answer? High quality pre-kindergarten programs. We should have known. We've focused on the wrong end of the spectrum - i.e., the back end, not the beginning. Educators have known this for years. This latest research just proves them right.

Sound too easy? Think about it. Children are like sponges - questioning constantly - never stopping. And yet, most of them receive no formal instruction until age 5.

For those living in poverty, those five critical years are spent in survival mode - not in enriching and developing activities. Children from low-income families fortunate enough to attend high-quality pre-k programs have been catching up academically with other classmates and been far less likely to need special education - or retention.

One of the focus areas of Success By 6, the early childhood initiative of the Lubbock Area United Way, is to increase the quality of early childhood care in our area.

Region 17's Education Service Center here is one of 20 agencies in the state participating in TEEM, aka the "Texas Early Education Model: Certifying Higher Levels of School Readiness in Cost Effective Ways" project.

The initiative focuses on improving school readiness of young children in all early childhood programs, providing extensive professional development for educators teaching in those programs, and integrating common goals and resources for cost efficiency.

EPI calculates by 2050 - just 44 years away - with high-quality, targeted pre-k programs in place for children ages 3 and 4 - Texas could see increased income of \$19 billion from these future workers. Crime-related savings would total \$9.9 billion in Texas alone. Those two figures, along with the \$8.9 billion generated from taxes paid - and welfare not paid - would bring Texas - us - a benefit of \$37.8 billion. The figures are even greater when all children ages 3 and 4 have an opportunity to attend a high-quality pre-k.

Investing in quality early childhood educational programs makes a difference to children, their families and our community. As Gov. Rick Perry, who proposed the Early Start Initiative several years ago, says, "Every child care setting should be a learning environment where every experience is a learning laboratory."

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On the Internet: Want more information? You may visit the Economic Policy Institute Web site. The address is: [www.epi.org](http://www.epi.org)