

From: [emily.harshman](#)
To: [Senate Finance Committee](#)
Subject: early childhood education
Date: Tuesday, March 08, 2016 3:28:50 PM

Dear Senate Finance Committee Members,

I urge you to reconsider cutting funds for early childhood education in Alaska. While I understand that Alaska is facing a very difficult budget shortfall and that funds must be cut, I would like you consider the future of our state and country before cutting early childhood education. Our children are our future and are also among our most vulnerable citizens in Alaska. After all, they are not old enough to have any say in issues that affect their future. Children under the age of 5 make up 7.5% of Alaska's population, and yet we only spend 0.5% of the budget on them.

While we face financial hardships today, we must also be looking towards building a better future. Our children are that future and it is vitally important that they receive a great education. After all, they will be the ones deciding important things about our own future as we age! Numerous studies have shown that the first three years of our lives are crucial for brain development. The major difference between brain development in a child versus learning an adult is a matter of degree: the brain is far more impressionable (neuroscientists use the term plastic) in early life than in maturity. This plasticity has both a positive and a negative side. On the positive side, it means that young children's brains are more open to learning and enriching influences. On the negative side, it also means that young children's brains are more vulnerable to developmental problems should their environment prove especially impoverished or un-nurturing.

Early education programs like Parent As Teachers (PAT) are extremely important in helping families to understand the importance of nurturing and teaching our children. They also help spot problems early, thus getting children the help that they need to become successful adults. My daughter was enrolled in Parents as Teachers, but we unfortunately lost our spot due to funding cuts last year. We really miss having the support that this program gave us. As a first time mom, this program was invaluable to my family during the time we were enrolled. We have learned so many valuable skills from this program including better ways to interact with our daughter in order to encourage her curiosity and learning. This is a fantastic community resource that will improve the lives of children provided that they receive funding. Let us not forget that knowledge is power and that raising children is a community effort. Children do not come with owner's manuals, programs like PAT give parents the tools to help their children thrive.

My daughter is also enrolled in the imagination library program in which she receive a new book every month. She loves getting new books and spends hours looking at her books. She is learning so many valuable things through these books.

An overwhelming body of science and research tells us that investments in early childhood - - such as in-home visits; exposure to plenty of high-quality, age-appropriate books; lots of quality parent engagement; and high quality pre-K -- reap concrete returns from cost savings and greater economic productivity.

Investments in early childhood save money in the schools by reducing the need for remediation, special education and holding children back. Investments in early childhood save

costs in the criminal justice system and welfare.

While I know that you will have to make many difficult decisions while balancing the budget, I urge you consider our future and to not cut educational programs for children. Doing so will have a very negative effect on all of Alaska. It will also cost the state much more money in the future.

Sincerely,
Emily Palmer, Juneau AK