EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

90% of human brain growth happens from birth to age six, but 98% of our state’s educational investments happen after kids reach age five. Increasing our state investments in the crucial ages from birth to age five supports improved educational outcomes throughout a child’s life. High quality early childhood education has positive impacts on kindergarten readiness, third grade reading levels, performance on tests throughout elementary school and to the end of high school, high school graduation, and enrollment and persistence in postsecondary education. The benefits also encompass a wide array of positive societal outcomes, including less engagement with the criminal justice system, and increased earnings and family stability as an adult. Home visiting – an early childhood education strategy in which a nurse or other professional coordinates services to families in their home – decreases the likelihood of abuse or neglect while improving family economic self-sufficiency.

Every dollar Washington invests – and has invested in the past – returns significant value to our state. Early childhood education programs in Washington state – like the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) – have a $4.33 return on investment for every $1 spent. Evidence-based home visiting can return benefits from $1.80 to $5.70 per dollar spent. Our previous state-level spending has ensured that we have two key infrastructure components already in place – a quality rating and coaching structure to ensure kids are in high-quality early care, and a research-proven, state-funded program for the highest need kids to get the supports they need to start school fully kindergarten-ready. Now is the time to see these previous investments through to their full potential, and to do the work to ensure we maximize our K-12 investments.

LOOKING AHEAD

Early childhood education programming is a vital investment for our children and the future of our state, and the COVID-19 pandemic has further destabilized equity in our early learning systems. League of Education Voters believes our state must provide immediate support to young learners and the early learning system by:

- Preserving and expanding access to high-quality, affordable, culturally and linguistically relevant early learning that meets family needs and supports a well-compensated, highly trained workforce.

Prioritizing early childhood education will help move us towards a more equitable and just education system.
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