

Head Start - Region VIII  
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by Jared Polis

#### Introduction

As I conclude my six-year term on the Colorado State Board of Education here in the next couple of months, I am struck by the importance of early education to so many of the goals for young children that we in the K-12 field strive for. As a businessman, I see this issue as critical for the current and future workforce, and quality early learning, such as Head Start, is so relevant to this country's business community because of what the research tells us about the return on investment – without question bigger than any other single program.

As a member of the State Board of Education, I see that quality early learning holds the promise of a better future for disadvantaged children.

For today's working parents, it is essential that their children receive safe and nurturing early education that will provide peace of mind when they must work full or even part-time. For our future workforce, children in good quality preschool programs like Head Start will be more strongly equipped to succeed in school and in the increasingly competitive economy.

I want to start by complimenting you, the parents and staff of Head Start programs. You are the ones doing the direct work to support poor children in this country. Much too often teachers, administrators, and parents are overlooked when credit gets tossed around. Every day you are the ones making a difference, your work is transforming despair into hope, and poverty into learning and opportunity.

On a macro level, I worry though because clearly Head Start is under attack and unsupported by our current administration and by some in Congress. We're seeing proposed funding cuts, weakening of Head Start policy councils that are run by parents, and block granting funds to states, which has potential negative consequences.

These attacks are why it's important that you on the ground level, and on the forefront, be entrepreneurs, giving hope through early learning. In my many years in business world, I have learned how important it is to always seek a creative edge, niche, market to survive. With Head Start under attack, it is imperative that you build support by being persuasive to public policymakers and private sector leaders, continuously proving how much of a difference Head Start makes in the lives of disadvantaged children and families.

You've heard the advocacy efforts directly from your national association – from Ron Herndon, President of the National Head Start Association. Remaining vigilant on vocal advocacy and why Head Start specifically must be supported needs to be a high priority.

For business, it's important to emphasize the returns on investments. That's why I'm proposing an idea to provide investments in human capital like bonding, which I'll mention a little later.

To reach policymakers who care about education, health care, the economy, and crime, it's crucial to emphasize those benefits – less special education and grade repetition, lower mortality rates, less welfare dependency, better jobs and wages, fewer jail beds and crime victims.

#### Head Start Background, the New America School and the Academy of Urban Learning

Supporting underprivileged children is the most important work we can do, and since the Johnson Administration, Head Start has been a leader in that effort. Giving families and children in poverty educational opportunities is at the heart of making this country great. They lead to more productive, healthier members of society, which benefits all of us. Since 1965, nearly 25 million pre-schoolers have benefited

from Head Start, including 1 million children in 2,700 programs this year. President Johnson envisioned Head Start as an anti-poverty solution. Today so many of our Head Start children – up to 60% - are also Hispanic, and have second language needs.

My foundation, the Jared Polis Foundation, is similarly addressing needs on the other end of the education continuum. A few years ago, we opened the New America Schools in the Denver area, which are public charter schools that provide education and English language acquisition to children of newly arrived immigrants, most of whom are age 16-21, and who would not have otherwise received any education. The schools have been so successful that enrollment has increased, and we have opened new schools, with a new one planned soon in the Vail area if approved. Several school boards have seen the necessity of the New America Schools and approved them in the last few years.

My foundation also started a charter high school in Denver (AUL) to educate students who are homeless or highly transient. Again, because it educates poor children, I see a nexus with Head Start.

It is in that context that I feel Head Start is promoting hope in the early years that our schools are continuing for older youth. The more access poor children can have to Head Start and other successful preschool programs, the better they perform in school, including graduation and college success.

#### Parental Involvement

Before moving into some particulars, I need to emphasize that the central component of Head Start – what makes it so successful – is the strong involvement of parents, who are the bedrock of good education. You all know how integral parents are to the policy councils that run Head Start, where parents decide the direction of each program.

This translates perfectly to the K-12 field – parent involvement is central to quality education. It is a research-based strategy for closing achievement gaps among poor and minority students. Parents are a crucial component of local school and district accountability committees; and they make up the backbone of political activism when we fight for school funding and important laws and rules.

Groups like the PTA and the Statewide Parent Coalition are a big reason we have been able to accomplish so much in Colorado, whether at the state capitol, the department of education, local school boards, or at the ballot box.

Thank you for being involved.

#### Connecting with Policymakers

The research is clear, but public policy has not caught up with the research. Scientific findings reveal major benefits to children participating in good preschool both in the short-term and throughout their lives. These benefits come with large savings to all of us in terms of reduced government costs in a wide range of areas. Outcomes include significant positive results in:

- Education
- Economic
- Crime prevention

It is because of these outcomes, and the accompanying cost savings that are inspiring lawmakers and other policymakers to be increasingly focused on quality, comprehensive preschool.

#### Policy Movement

As cities such as Denver, counties such as Eagle and Summit, legislators in Colorado and other states all consider policies to expand early care and education, we are hearing elected leaders, including Denver

Mayor John Hickenlooper, county commissioners and state legislative leaders - cite the research with increasing regularity in an intensive effort to gain increased funding for these programs.

#### Early Education Connects to Many Policy Areas

Because of our economic needs of two-parent working families and the realities of single parents who must work, most children spend most of the day in child care and early education (two-thirds to three-quarters of pre-Kindergarten age in metro areas). This situation has led our policymakers, state and local agency staff, and advocates to understand that early education has critical relevance and linkages to other significant policy areas – health, mental health, and family support, including parent education and family literacy. Preschool programs like Head Start are an ideal place for young children and their families to gain these crucial comprehensive services.

I have found this also to be true for the K-12 system, and that is why it's so important to bring comprehensive services (whether it's family literacy, parent involvement, counseling, good nutrition, after-school programs, or health and mental health) to where most children are during the day: our preschools, child care programs, and schools.

#### State Board of Education and Local School Districts Support Good Preschool

Drawing on my experience in Colorado, I have seen my State Board of Education colleagues from both parties emphasize the importance of early learning to the most critical components of education: literacy, language, parent involvement, parent education, critical thinking, communication, and access to comprehensive health and nutrition services. For the third consecutive year, the State Board of Education is including increased state funding for quality preschool for at-risk children. The Colorado Preschool and Kindergarten Program (CPKP) is a program directly under our jurisdiction being run out of CDE.

At the local school board levels, the Colorado Association of School Boards (CASB) has formed an early childhood task force this year - this group is proposing that CASB take some clear early education positions through some progressive legislative resolutions. The Colorado Association of School Executives (CASE) held a special statewide meeting on preschool earlier this year for its elementary school principals and drew participation from the Speaker of the House.

The K-12 field in general has increased its attention on good preschool programs. Because of its enormous and long-term impact on high-school success, quality early education was a major recommendation of the recent Colorado Commission on High School Improvement, which I co-chaired; it is documented as a proven strategy to prevent achievement gaps among poor and minority students – a top education priority in Colorado; and increased funding for preschool and full-day Kindergarten were recommended by Colorado's School Finance Task Force last year.

#### Quality is Key for Return on Investment

When we talk about quality preschool, that notion is integral to successful outcomes - and not just words - especially for at-risk children. This is why Head Start is such an effective program. There is huge importance to quality because research has found that low-quality programs can actually hinder healthy child development and good future results, but high-quality programs support good future results. As a business analogy – ProFlowers was successful because the flowers were good quality, not just any old flowers. If I invested in cheap flowers, it wouldn't give us that same return. The same is true for early childhood education.

Because quality services cost more, we need to shift the political will to ensure that decision-makers at the local, state, and federal levels understand that we must pay for quality because all of the outcomes are based on quality, good and bad. You who are so involved in good early learning through Head Start know first-hand what "quality" means – but we must ensure that policymakers know clearly what it means:

- Teachers and providers with adequate training, education, experience and good pay and benefits;
- Teacher-child interaction;
- Parent involvement;

- A healthy and safe environment with low adult-child ratios:
- Compliance with licensing standards; and
- Comprehensive services – meaning access to health, nutrition, mental health, and other social services for children and families enrolled in preschool and child care.

It is that aspect of comprehensive services where Head Start best exemplifies why it is a good quality program and why it has improved the lives of so many people.

Colorado and other states benefit from quality rating systems for early childhood education programs. In Colorado, we have Qualistar, which visits programs and rates programs on the abovementioned quality components using a zero to 4 star system, so parents, staff, and the public know what the level of quality is, and necessary improvements can be made for the benefits of children.

The time is now to move forward on expanding good early care and education because it is a bipartisan issue and increasingly state and local leaders are talking about and advocating for early care and education.

### Research Highlights

As you know, the research is overwhelmingly convincing about the importance of good early education. In an era where all policies are judged on their fiscal implications, it is necessary for policymakers at all levels to understand the massive long-term savings realized from these programs.

I am amazed and dismayed by people who contend there is no research showing the benefits of Head Start. Don't listen to the nay-sayers – they have a political agenda to stop funding and other supports to this important program. You should feel empowered by the research. The federal FACES (Family And Child Experience Survey) study, Barnett's research, and the Journal of Education have all documented Head Start's positive results in the past few years, including:

- Raising children's reading, writing, and math levels by Kindergarten
- Better cognitive, language, and health measures than a control group
- Increased test scores
- Positive long-term effects on grade repetition, special education and graduation rates

From where I sit on the State Board of Education, and throughout the K-12 education community, these findings are so exciting, so central to what we in the field are trying to accomplish. We talk a lot about literacy as the cornerstone of success; we talk about closing the achievement gap; we talk about high school graduation and access to higher education. Head Start and other comprehensive preschool programs are a big part of the solution. It is essential that anyone who cares about positive learning outcomes, and especially those in positions of power that can do something about it, knows about these effects. The same studies have found that clearly good educational outcomes lead to good economic outcomes, and we'll see that from the following couple slides. Because of these persuasive outcomes, we see economic experts such as Nobel Prize winner James Heckman, former President of First Bank Doug Price – now the Chairman of Qualistar, and Denver Public School Board member Bruce Hoyt, an investment director - focusing on early education. Even the Federal Reserve Bank looked at and reported on the positive benefits.

At age 27 and again at age 40, the Perry study found:

- Higher earnings – nearly 30% of preschool participants earn \$2000 or more per month compared to 8% without preschool
- Home ownership – (35% vs. 12%)
- Welfare dependency – (42% vs. 20%)

The philanthropic community is growing in its interest. In Colorado, the Mile High United Way is prioritizing quality early education in its strategic plan, and foundations such as Piton, Temple Buell focusing on the issue. Now the National Center on Education and the Economy, and foundations such as Pew and Gates are becoming national leaders as well.

It's insightful to notice the increased interest in the early education issue among law enforcement officials (DA's, police, sheriffs, judges). Some of you may have heard of a national organization called "Fight Crime Invest In Kids" (comprised of DA's and sheriffs around the country) has been focusing on early education the past decade.

Studies show a substantial difference between the number of arrests and incarceration rates of preschool participants and non-participants. These outcomes are a huge component of the cost savings that we'll discuss next.

Reductions in crime costs, special education placements and grade retention translate into huge savings to our education budgets.

When the Perry preschool participants reached age 27, the:

- Total Benefit-Cost Ratio was \$8.74 to every \$1 invested;
- The Estimated Total Annual Rate of Return was 16%; and
- The Public Rate of Return was 12%

By the time these participants reached age 40, these numbers, which are unheard of in any other type of human investment remained steady.

#### Policy Implications

These findings are as clear as any research gets in terms of pointing to solutions for public policymakers from all levels and sectors.

#### Federal

##### Head Start bill

Regrettably President Bush has proposed a Head Start budget that includes flat funding a year after Congress cut the program by 1% (which means an 8% reduction in Head Start funding in real dollars since 2003.) This disgraceful position is more remarkable because all former presidents from both parties have increased Head Start funds for the previous 40 years.

Such federal cuts result in fewer staff and lower pay for the hard work that you do. NHSA estimates that if these cuts go through, 19,000 children would lose enrollment, including 500 children in your region alone.

The bill passed by the U.S. House of Representatives would also make the parent-driven Head Start policy councils advisory, rather than required, which would dilute the important role that parents have in governance of local programs.

#### NCLB

No Child Left Behind has pushed mandatory testing to 4 year olds in preschool without proven and reliable methods that are often not testing the right things. This is one of my many concerns with NCLB. We do need to show preschool outcomes, and in Colorado, the Department of Education has initiated "Results Matter," which can be controversial, but Head Start, along with High/Scope and other models, are approved Colorado approaches to measure children's outcomes.

#### Child Care and TANF

With President Bush proposing flat funding of the federal Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) legislation and child care under welfare reform through the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), it is essential that our new Congress fights back and stands up for more funding for our young children.

## State

In Colorado, there is a lot of activity at the state level. The legislature, governor, Lt. Governor, and SBE all have important roles in leading and administering supports for early education.

- The legislature has funded the state preschool program for about 20 years, and has lately been increasing slots.
- State lawmakers also created the consolidated child care pilots/councils in 17 counties, and are examining a possible expansion – Governor Bill Owens vetoed this expansion last year. This year, another expansion of the councils may be proposed.
- Our Lt. Governor, Jane Norton, has administered the State Head Start Collaboration Office, helping to guide the coordination of Head Start with state programs such as state preschool, the K-12 system, child care, health care and disability agencies, child welfare agencies, family support programs, early childhood and education foundations, the private sector, and nonprofit advocacy groups.

Our current governor unfortunately has not had a large focus on early education (approving preschool cuts in 2002 and 2003), and I expect that our next Governor and Lt. Governor will do better on this issue, whoever is elected. At the Colorado State Board of Education, we will continue to advise lawmakers about the needs for preschool and full-day Kindergarten. One option is for Colorado and the other states represented here to join the 17 states to supplement Head Start with state dollars.

## Local

State law in Colorado provides federal funding to 17 local communities (known as councils or pilots) around the state to coordinate good early care and education programs (including Head Start, child care, and all school district early education programs) to maximize access and quality through innovative partnerships. Some of these collaborations have led to an increased number of hours for services. The law requires coordination with health, nutrition, mental health, and family support programs, which is why Head Start is perfectly situated to be involved in these exciting partnerships.

Even some counties that are not in the local councils, such as Adams County, Grand County, and Chaffee County are doing great work in this regard.

### Specific Early Childhood Partnerships with Head Start

A couple weeks ago, I spoke in Adams County (which is just north of Denver) about early education issues and noted how policy and program leaders there are working across school district, county and municipality lines to create a funding solution. One of the best ways to do this, as evidenced in this county, is to coordinate with Head Start because it has the infrastructure to provide comprehensive services.

In Adams County, Head Start partners with four different school districts to provide full-day Head Start through shared Head Start and state preschool funding and facilities to provide full-day and comprehensive early education services for at-risk children (including health, mental health, nutrition, dental health). Similar partnerships occur throughout the state and nation.

Head Start agreements with school boards and superintendents are similar to business partnerships that I have formed with untraditional partners. And in my K-12 experiences, such collaborations remind me of the unique ways that some school districts have worked to create the New America Schools that I mentioned earlier.

### Local Ballot Initiatives

As I alluded to earlier, voters in Denver and Eagle counties this year face ballot initiatives to expand early childhood services, and last year Summit County voters passed an initiative to improve the quantity and quality of early education.

In Denver, a measure backed by Mayor Hickenlooper, would raise the Denver sales and use tax by .12% for the next decade – raising about \$12 million per year – to increase access to 4-year old preschool. The program is voluntary and some of the funding would go to quality.

The funds would provide a credit to families for preschool tuition and support outreach for enrollment so any family who wants their child in preschool would be able to do so. The initiative would also provide resources for accountability (monitoring, measurement) and administration.

In Eagle County, the proposal is broader, allowing funds to be used for quality early care and education, parent resource and visitation services, health care programs, social-emotional services, and special needs services for young children. It would raise the local property tax by up to 1 and ½ mills through 2022, which would cost the average taxpayer about \$50 per year.

### Human Capital Investments

As child outcomes of good early education are becoming clearer, I am proposing a plan to encourage private dollars into early childhood education programs by allowing the investors to recoup some of the savings. Very similar to physical bonding. Some of the returns would certainly be more short term than others, including special education and grade repetitions, which could be realized in a few years; whereas others would take longer, such as graduation rates and crime costs. It is difficult to quantify exact costs to victims. However, physical bonding has the same challenges in terms of quantifying returns.

It will be important to decide what programs would be appropriate for investments, but quality, proven systems like Head Start would be the most ideal.

Another challenge is child mobility across district, county, or city boundaries, but again some formula could be established to take that into consideration. We are already seeing this concept in applied somewhat in Oregon, where some of the state's prison systems are projecting the number of prison beds based on 3rd grade reading scores.

Please let me know if you're interested in helping us with this effort.

### Closing

Across the education, health care, economic, criminal justice, and business fields, we are seeing more and more enthusiasm about quality early education programs, such as Head Start. We need to be relentless in advocating for significant investments for a better society. You who live and breathe it every day are the unsung heroes of this movement. Thank you for contributing to children's lives.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to talk with you today.