



News Release

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Iowa Business Council Endorses Support and Action Steps for Early Childhood Education

March 31, 2005 – (Des Moines, IA) – As Iowans have long valued quality K–12 education, the Iowa Business Council is championing support of additional early childhood education for children of pre-kindergarten age. In March, the Council ratified a statement containing nine principles on early childhood education.

Max Phillips, Chair of the Council's Early Childhood Education Subcommittee and President of Qwest Iowa states, "Early education for Iowa's children has been under study and we've found that, in addition to the obvious social benefits for individual children, there are pronounced business benefits as well which stand to increase Iowa business productivity and boost our economic vitality. Education is definitely a business issue, not just a social issue."

The Council has found that employees with access to quality early childhood education/care for their children exhibit the following characteristics:

- Greater productivity in the workplace
- Experience a lower rate of absenteeism
- Have a lower overall job turnover rate
- Are better contributors to employer sales and company profit

In turn, companies are more effective and efficient allowing for a greater return on investment for stakeholders and consumers.

Study of the issue supports the position that a child's quality of life and the eventual contributions he or she makes as an adult can be linked to the first years of life. Further, there is evidence that when children are "behind" when they start school, they tend to fall even further behind.

The majority of states have adopted some type of early childhood vision or program. Relative to other states, Iowa is behind in support and adoption of initiatives compared to 40 other states. Current leaders in early childhood education include North Carolina, Georgia, Wisconsin, Virginia and South Carolina. The Council believes action is necessary to assure Iowa children don't fall behind when compared to the rest of the country.

Robert Koob, Ph.D., a member of the Council's Early Childhood Education Subcommittee and President of the University of Northern Iowa adds, "Research on the business side of the issue indicates that every dollar invested in a child's pre-kindergarten education will return \$7 in reduced costs for special education, state assistance or correction system costs later."



The Council considers the state's existing infrastructure of public and private childcare and education facilities to be the natural foundation of voluntary early childhood education. At the same time, equal access to programs and quality of the programs themselves are key ingredients to success for the state overall.

Action Steps Being Taken

- A Quality Checklist for consumers of childcare services has been produced by the Business Council and will be available through www.earlychildhoodiowa.org. The checklist helps guide parents in making appropriate decisions in the best interest of their children. It helps ensure that quality of services figure into the decision making process. Council member companies are encouraging their 150,000 employees to begin usage this year.
- The Council also supports the efforts of Governor Tom Vilsack to establish a statewide Quality Ratings System of child care facilities to help assure and broaden quality programs. The ratings will help recognize quality programs and encourage replications of such programs.
- Initially two conferences are planned – one of them occurring later in 2005. The first will address the need for and importance of quality early childhood education to an audience of policymakers, business leaders and educators. A second conference will address successful programs in other states.
- The Council endorses the concept of a statewide system that provides universal access of quality education for pre-kindergarteners four years of age. Regardless of the nature of the ultimate program mechanics and whether offered by public or private providers, equal access is viewed as key to creating the strongest possible program in Iowa.

“With current Iowa demographics indicating more declining school enrollments, we have an opportunity to explore the feasibility of reallocating existing education funds for universal access to quality pre-kindergarten education,” said Todd Raba, Chair of the Iowa Business Council and President, MidAmerican Energy Company. “We fully support meaningful discussion with policymakers to listen to their thoughts and concerns, discuss our perspective and add our voices to the dialogue. Together we can be collaborative agents for change, providing unified leadership to make sure Iowa excels in early childhood education.”

The Iowa Business Council is a non-profit, non-partisan organization of the top executives of 23 of Iowa's largest businesses and three Regent universities, employing over 150,000 Iowans statewide with capital assets of \$20 billion. The purpose of the Council is to focus the active personal commitment of the leaders of Iowa's major employers in statewide leadership roles to enhance Iowa's economic vitality. Council members identify major business issues, evaluate options and assist in implementing solutions through collaborative public/private partnerships.

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