

## Evidence points to better early childhood education

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The most important investments we make as a society are those that help our children get off to a strong start in life. That's why we've stepped up our focus in this area, leveraging state and federal investments here in Delaware. We are in the middle of a great story – a story about giving our state's children a great start in school and in life, but we still have a lot of work to do.

We have been hard at work over the past couple years supporting enhanced outcomes for our earliest learners, including providing a significant increase in early childhood funding. Just this week we laid out our road map. Delaware's early childhood strategic plan was launched on Monday and is available online. Called Sustaining Early Success, the plan focuses on creating and sustaining a comprehensive early childhood system for all Delaware children and their families, through four strategic goals:

- Enable Delaware children to become the healthiest in the nation – physically, emotionally and behaviorally. The state will take a “whole child” approach and link children's health care, social and emotional development and family and community support to help them be ready for school.
- Assure all Delaware children have access to high-quality early childhood programs and professionals. The state will significantly increase early learning provider participation in the Delaware Stars program, particularly for high-needs children, and offer more professional development and wage enhancements to support the early childhood workforce.
- Create an aligned and effective early learning system, from infants to third-graders. Delaware will build new bridges between early childhood and K-12 education using cross-sector professional development and the Delaware Early Learner Survey to strengthen understanding of early childhood learning and development and improve later educational outcomes.
- Sustain system improvement. Delaware will create a more integrated, sustainable system with strong oversight and accountability and data-driven decision-making to continuously improve children's progress. Our state must continue to link these elements together to set each child on a course toward lifelong success. Ultimately, the payoff benefits children, their families, employers, teachers and taxpayers. It affects every aspect of our lives, from healthier and safer communities to a stronger tax base and more qualified workforce. More specifically, students who have attended quality preschool are more likely to graduate from high school and go on to college, ultimately providing Delaware with a stronger workforce and allowing us to compete more effectively in a global economy.

Nobel Prize-winning economist James Heckman of the University of Chicago makes the case for such an investment, saying, “Early childhood investments of high quality have lasting effects. ... In the long run, significant improvements in the skill levels of American workers, especially workers not attending college, are unlikely without substantial improvements in the arrangements that foster early learning. We cannot afford to postpone investing in children until they become adults, nor can we wait until they reach school age – a time when it may be too late to intervene.”

Our state benefits from a committed community of advocates for early childhood education. Every citizen has a stake in the success of these efforts, and it's time now for us to expand our base of advocates to include each of you. Going forward, we need to do what Delaware often prides itself on doing best – driving change through partnership and collaboration.

The evidence is irrefutable, the path forward is clear and the stakes are profoundly important.

This is the single most important investment we can make for a better future.

We are in the middle of a great story – and it's time to write the next chapter. We can do it, and with your help, together we will sustain early success in early childhood education.

Readers can view the plan at: [decc.delaware.gov/2013/04/11/sustainingearlysuccess2013](http://decc.delaware.gov/2013/04/11/sustainingearlysuccess2013).

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