



# KANSAS

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

KATHLEEN SEBELIUS, GOVERNOR

For immediate release:  
May 23, 2007

Nicole Corcoran, Press Secretary  
785.368.8500

## **Nation needs commitment to early learning**

*The following is a column by Governor Kathleen Sebelius:*

All Americans know the power of education to change lives and expand opportunities. That's why the guarantee of a quality public education has always been such an integral part of our nation's promise to its young people, and why we're seeing states making significant new commitments to K-12 schools.

But too many children are entering those schools without the basic skills they need to succeed in kindergarten and beyond, which is why we need a national commitment to early learning efforts such as pre-k.

This national problem was brought home to Kansas policymakers by a recent survey of teachers here which revealed that less than half of children start kindergarten fully ready to learn. This isn't just an issue here – it's a national problem.

Starting off school behind means many of these children stay behind throughout their school lives and into adulthood, meaning they never reach their full potential. This costs states money in terms of spending on remedial classes and programs, which are less effective and cost-efficient than early learning efforts.

There are social costs as well, especially in reduced wages for workers who aren't ultimately as successful as they would have been had they been able to take advantage of the full opportunities of their education.

Every dollar we invest in early childhood education we can save seven future dollars by having fewer juvenile offenders in our prisons, fewer Americans on public assistance and a workforce more nimble and prepared for an ever changing world.

We can eliminate these problems through investments in early learning which close the achievement gap currently keeping too many children from achieving their full potential.

Ninety percent of a child's brain development occurs before the age of five, and children who attend early childhood programs are far more likely to enter kindergarten ready to learn, read at an appropriate grade level and go on to graduate from high school. That's why education during the early years crucial in helping children acquire the tools and skills they need to succeed in kindergarten and beyond.

In 2006, Kansas legislators supported my recommendation to increase funding for early childhood education, including the creation of pre-K pilot projects around our state. This year, they again answered my call, committing an additional \$5.1 million to early learning.

These efforts will have significant and lasting benefits in Kansas, just as similar efforts can have a positive impact on our nation. That's why 29 governors proposed increased support

for pre-k and other early learning efforts this year, and why the nation's governors call on Congress and the President to work with us to bring early learning opportunities to all young Americans.

The National Summit on America's Children has the potential to unify the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress around the goal of improving the lives of children in our country. We must take advantage of this opportunity to bring together policymakers, educators, early learning professionals and parents to ensure every child has the education needed to achieve his or her full potential.

We must make a national commitment to provide every child with access to quality early learning opportunities, for their sake and for the sake of our nation's long-term prosperity.

# # #