

The IWV early child development report received a good editorial in today's *Huntington Herald Dispatch*. The link is herald-dispatch.com under opinion. The article:

Huntington Herald Dispatch

Opinion Page

Editorial: Early childhood development proposals deserve a closer look

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The Herald-Dispatch

A new report that focuses on the well-being of young West Virginia children may not have all the answers, but it puts forth two worthy ideas that the state should explore seriously.

The report released Monday by the nonprofit public policy group Imagine West Virginia makes two key recommendations.

First, it calls for widespread, affordable child care. Related to that recommendation is the group's call for developing a system for evaluating and monitoring the quality of such programs, which the group suggests should be aimed at children from newborns to 3 years old.

The second key proposal is the expansion of what the group calls "in-home family education." That would involve home visitations and assistance for parents in areas ranging from health and immunization to promoting early reading.

The question becomes how to accomplish these. Imagine West Virginia doesn't have the answers to that, and like every program that no doubt requires state government's support, a balancing act on services vs. costs must be performed. But there are compelling reasons to give the proposals a hard look.

First of all, there is solid evidence that focusing on early child development and care can pay off. West Virginia already has bought into this idea with its expanding pre-kindergarten program, which offers early education for 4-year-olds.

There's been no hard data collected in West Virginia yet to show Pre-K is making an academic difference. But research in other states suggest it does.

For example, in New Mexico, 4-year-olds showed increased vocabulary and math scores, as well as higher literacy skills. Research looking at Oklahoma's Pre-K program suggests it has improved reading, writing and math skills no matter a child's demographics.

Providing more good-quality day care programs in the state could only help provide more children a better start and a more solid foundation for success in

their later years. The same can be said for helping parents keep their kids healthier and promoting reading at an early age.

The need for programs aimed at our youngest children is compelling. Imagine West Virginia's report says the state has 64,000 children under age 6 who are "at-risk" and in greater need of day-care and in-home services. The report also notes that more than half of West Virginia's children age 5 or younger live in households with either single parents or two working parents.

The report suggests there can be some long-term payoffs that could counter the costs of implementing or expanding these programs. Cal Kent, a Marshall University economist who helped prepare the "Right and Smart" report, said that investment in early childhood programs could reduce costs for social programs aimed at adults, including jails and prisons. With more of the state's children successful in school, the reasoning is that fewer will run afoul of the law or otherwise need social services.

West Virginia, already making strides in providing for its young children, might find that it could do even better by implementing and expanding these two programs.