



Help us help more kids

June 9, 2010

I welcomed Krista Ramsey's "Setback feared for incoming kindergartners" (June 6). Cincinnati Union Bethel operates four Head Start preschools on the West Side. Last year, when lawmakers eliminated the Early Learning Initiative, or ELI, a preschool program for low-income children similar to Head Start, we lost the ability to serve approximately 200 children.

Fortunately, we are still a Head Start provider and have been for years, but we worry about what has happened to our ELI children. We imagine many of them have ended up outside the educational system. Our program strengths are that we have a curriculum and qualified teachers who teach. We are preparing children for kindergarten; we are not simply providing day care. We hear again and again, and reports show, that we are successful.

A teacher recently posted on our agency's website this message: "I teach kindergarten for Cincinnati Public Schools, and I wanted to let you know what a great program you have! All the students who have come to me from your program are totally ready for my class and have obviously been educated and stimulated. I'm impressed with the literature and investigations your students are exposed to and what a great impact they have had on their learning."

We were the first Head Start program in the city that was awarded Step Up to Quality stars, a voluntary state rating system for early care and education centers in Ohio. We are making a difference, but we could do more if we could reach more children.

According to the Ohio Department of Education measurement tools, income is the single most important factor in determining school readiness. It outweighs all other issues, such as

race and gender. While a low-income status diminishes a child's chances of success, it doesn't have to be a prediction of failure.

It may seem expensive now, but for every dollar that Ohioans put into early childhood education, we save \$7 down the road on intervention and remediation. Our children are worth it.



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