

The POTUS Came Down To Georgia

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Head Start Leading in Early Education

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Last week, President Obama delivered his State of the Union address before a Joint Session of Congress. In a speech outlining many of his priorities for America, the president identified early childhood education as a critical investment to make in our children. Not only do children perform better in school after early education, they go on to lead richer lives and achieve greater success. We know now that the early years of life are critical to cognitive and social development, and we applaud President Obama's choice to emphasize the economic growth we can guarantee with stronger early education investments.

It was heartening that the President made a point to travel to our Head Start program in Decatur two days after his speech to double down on his call for greater access to early education. We were grateful to have President Obama, Mayor Reed, and other local leaders in our classroom to learn more about Head Start's model that prepares at-risk children for kindergarten. Speaking at the Decatur Recreation Center, the President echoed his message from the previous night, "This works ... We know it works. If you're looking for a good bang for your educational buck, this is it right here."

In his State of the Union and during his visit, the president made clear that all children should have access to early education. Those of us who have dedicated our lives to providing early learning services to at-risk children agree wholeheartedly.

But the details of this plan matter. We need to get this right — especially in times of tight budgets. As those details are worked out with Congress and our partners in the field, we should look to what is already working in early childhood education. Head Start and Early Head Start are two effective and targeted investments our leaders have been making in pre-K education. Through hundreds of studies over four decades, we have confirmed beyond doubt that Head Start participants enter kindergarten at an advantage and are better prepared for life and education than their peers.

In Washington and in Decatur, President Barack Obama delivered a call to action: all children in America can be ready for school if we invest in their academic and behavioral development. He views early education the way we do — as an economic imperative which will help to ensure the future health and well-being of the nation. Funding for Head Start and Early Head Start — reinforced by every president since the program's inception — marks our commitment to that imperative.

For nearly 50 years, Head Start has been getting results in preparing the neediest children

for school, and leading the early childhood field in innovation and quality through both high standards and relentless insistence on excellence. It would be a disservice to our children to assume that interventions for young children are one-size fits all, but we must strive to ensure that they are able to access a high quality, comprehensive program that sets them on a path to lifelong learning. "I believe from personal experience that Head Start prepares a child for life-long learning". "I attended Head Start as a child and grew fond of reading and learning." "I remember how excited I became when I received my weekly readers in the mail and how I couldn't wait to attend summer enrichment programs at school." "I believe that early learning from Head Start to Brenau University where I received my MBA degree to on the job professional development tremendously helped me achieve educational and personal goals that I set for myself."- Juanita Yancey, Executive Officer- Georgia Head Start Association.

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