

## **Planning for Our Future**

The Department of Labor predicts that over the next twenty years the job market will undoubtedly require more highly skilled workers. The Department has completed a study which identifies industry sectors that will experience high growth, high demand and great economic impact. Some of those sectors include the biotech industry, health care and retail. The idea of new emerging industries needing a highly skilled and educated workforce is not a new one; as technology advances there is a greater need to develop a workforce that has the skill set to compete with the global market. As one of the most competitive nations we need to prepare a workforce that can meet those demands. Starting to prepare children for school before they even enroll in kindergarten is one way to make that sure we are developing an educated workforce. The link between early childhood education and student's educational aptitude later in life is undeniable: the earlier you start, the more developed a child's brain becomes, hopefully into one that can learn for life. Preparing our children with quality preschool programs addresses this matter. It also ensures that here in California, the seventh largest economy in the world stays competitive in the global market.

Proposition 82 seeks to bridge this gap. On June 6<sup>th</sup> Ballot voters will be asked to approve Proposition 82 which will provide free and high quality preschool education to every four-year old in California. It offers trained, credentialed teachers in every classroom, more parental involvement, and strict accountability and enforcement to ensure that every dollar is dedicated to preschool.

School readiness has become a major priority in Alameda County. In Alameda County with a population of nearly 1.5 million residents, 28% of Alameda County's populations are preschool aged and of those, 15% are African American. The cost of quality preschool here in Alameda County is estimated to be over \$5,000 annually per child, pricing out many low income families. Currently only 68% of children participate in any type of preschool program despite the large amount of documented benefits.

Proposition 82 would be funded by 1.7% tax on individual annual incomes over \$400,000 and couples' income over \$800,000. It has been estimated that the tax will raise annual revenues of \$2.1 billion in 2007-08. All revenues would be spent to underwrite the cost of California's youth to attend preschool.

Preschool quality plays a crucial role in children's social and cognitive development. While preschool quality is a critical issue for all children, it matters more for low-income children. Good preschool programs are associated with psychologically and socially healthier children. A recent RAND Corporation study showed that if children in Alameda County attended quality early care and preschool programs, some of the projected benefits include: 4%-6% fewer students using special education; a 9% increase in the high school graduation rate; and a 13% drop in juvenile

court cases. The RAND Corporation predicts California will see a return of \$2.62 for every \$1 invested in quality preschool, due to reduced crime and dropout rates.

According to the Department of Education in the school year 2001-02, 48,221 youth dropped out of high school. The Oakland Unified School District graduates less than half of their incoming freshmen on time, according to new research by the Urban Institute. California's largest school districts have some of the worst on-time graduation rates. Implementing quality preschool programs would decrease this rate.

Additionally, in 2000 the cost to house a youth at the California Youth Authority was over \$41,000 annually but to educate the same student from kindergarten thru 12<sup>th</sup> grade costs just over \$7,200 annually. This is very ironic that it costs more to keep one youth jailed than to educate them. For the \$41,000 the State spends to incarcerate this youth, they could also send her to Harvard University for one year with room and board, or pay tuition for her for all four years at UC Berkeley.

Proposition 82 will help more children read and learn which, in turn, will strengthen our schools and improve education for all our kids. Teachers have testified that children who attend quality preschool are better prepared to learn. These are the students who tend to graduate from high school and participate in the workforce; our workforce which is expanding and growing in leaps and bounds.

In order for us to address the ills of our communities and assist our children for the future it is important that we ensure that they have access to a quality education. Learning does not start at kindergarten, it starts before. Quality preschool programs are one way to ensure that our children will thrive.