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Study Backs Moves on Preschool Access Signals New Iowa Initiative is Step Forward

MOUNT VERNON, Iowa (May 3, 2007) – New legislation to expand access to preschool for Iowa children may be a step toward a stronger economy and fiscal balance, an Iowa analyst said today.

Peter Fisher, research director of the nonpartisan Iowa Policy Project (IPP), said new research published today by the Economic Policy Institute shows the kinds of benefits the state can expect from its investments in early childhood education.

“The benefits of high-quality pre-kindergarten education are clear in this report. The bill that passed the Iowa Legislature this year takes a strong opening step for Iowa kids and the state budget,” Fisher said.

Fisher made the comments following release of *Enriching Children, Enriching the Nation*, by economist Robert G. Lynch. The report estimates the benefits of a high quality pre-kindergarten education not only for children and their parents, but also for government budgets.

“Governments can realize huge savings in areas such as remedial education, law enforcement, and child welfare.” Lynch said. “Add to that the benefits of less crime and a more highly skilled workforce – and that makes pre-K spending one of the smartest moves governments can make.”

The new report is available at www.epinet.org.

Iowa lawmakers recently passed legislation to establish a voluntary, statewide preschool program for 4-year-old children. House File 877 will provide access to a preschool education for 90 percent of 4-year-old children in Iowa within four years.

Lynch’s study provides state-by-state estimates of the costs and benefits of a universal pre-K program for 3- and 4-year-old children. The study finds:

- If Iowa state government paid almost all the costs, a universal pre-K program would provide \$1.17 in eventual state budgetary savings for every dollar spent.
- Including benefits to individuals from higher earnings, a universal pre-K program would eventually return \$8 in public and private benefits for every state dollar spent.

The Lynch study is based on half-day high-quality preschool programming costing \$6,300 per child. Iowa’s preschool program will provide 10 hours per week of instruction, or about a quarter-day of preschool programming and will cost about \$3,300 per child.

Lynch’s study also examined the costs and benefits of a preschool program only for children from low-income families. Such a program would produce somewhat higher public budgetary savings by targeting benefits to at-risk children who realize the most significant improvements in earnings and life outcomes as a result of their preschool education.

The IPP is a nonpartisan, nonprofit research and policy analysis organization based in Mount Vernon.