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Opinion

## **NEW: LETTER: Investing in early childhood education pays off in long run**

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On Jan. 24, the "Kids Count" article highlighted how rising poverty, abuse and neglect in Michigan are a threat to our children and their livelihood. I would like to emphasize how important this issue is to our state and local communities.

In the first five years of our lives we learn more quickly than any other time in our lives. When children between the ages of newborn and 5 receive the right things, it allows them to grow and reach their full potential. These years form the foundation that will shape the future of our health, happiness, growth and development, socialization, learning ability and life in general.

"Children in poverty often experience hunger, abuse or neglect, extreme stress, depression or anxiety, and other issues impacting their overall health, as well as their ability to learn and grow into successful adults," said Michele Corey, vice president for programs at Michigan's Children.

Therefore, if a community invests in early childhood education it could generate big returns for everyone. Nobel Prize-winning economist James Heckman has shown that every dollar invested in quality early childhood education for at-risk children delivers economic gains of 10 percent per year.

Investing in these programs also saves states money due to fewer referrals for special education and lower incarceration rates.

Isabella County has a Great Start Parent Coalition that meets once monthly in Mt. Pleasant and is open to anyone interested in early childhood issues. The GSPC was created to allow for parent feedback in state and local early childhood systems. With these systems in place, studies show high school graduation rates increase, drop-out rates decrease, child abuse is reduced and welfare users are reduced and even fewer students need special education courses. GSPC also communicates its needs and expectations with state legislators in an effort to be part of the solution. Please consider how you can help support these efforts.

Shannon Putman

Great Start Parent Coalition Member

Mt. Pleasant

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