

BUSINESS VIEW

Clear case for early childhood funding

We write from opposite ends of the political spectrum. One of us, Arnold Hiatt, the former chairman and CEO of Stride Rite, is a Democrat. The other, Paul O'Brien, the former CEO of New England Telephone, is a Republican. Yet we strongly agree about the importance of increasing investments in high-quality early education.

It's why we both joined the board of Strategies for Children, a statewide

**ARNOLD
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& PAUL
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policy and advocacy organization that works to ensure that children in Massachusetts have access to high-quality early education and become proficient readers by the end of third grade. It's why we both support Gov. Patrick's proposed new investments in high-quality early education and why we both joined 70 other business leaders from across the state in signing a letter urging the Legislature

to approve the plan and the revenue to fund it.

The reason is simple. We are businessmen concerned that the achievement gap threatens the commonwealth's ability to fill the pipeline of skilled, well-educated labor our economy needs. We are bottom-line men who know a good investment when we see one. High-quality early education is one such investment.

The need is clear.

Almost 8,000 Massachusetts students dropped out of high school in the 2011-12 academic year, and each dropout costs Massachusetts, on average, almost \$350,000 in lower tax revenues and higher public assistance costs over a lifetime.

The governor's proposed \$131 million in new investments in fiscal year 2014 build on the strong foundation that Massachusetts has laid for a statewide system of high-quality early education. It includes an oversubscribed scholarship program for working early educators pursuing college degrees. It includes a shared understanding of levels of quality, defined through a Quality Rating and Improvement System, as well as a pathway for programs to improve. It encompasses all the settings — center-based programs, public school pre-kindergarten, Head Start, family child care homes — where young children learn.

If we want to ensure that children start school ready to succeed, we must invest in early childhood.