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Early childhood, good investment

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My message is simple: it's never too early to invest in a child, no matter the nation's economic struggles. Access to quality early childhood education is the dividing line for many families between economic isolation and economic opportunity. The most cost-effective and successful way to close the achievement gap is through early intervention and childhood education.

The republican and democratic nominees for president have each said that energy independence and childhood education are key investments for America's future that cannot, and will not, be deferred. It's the right thing to do and it's the economically prudent thing to do.

As someone who has spent an entire career in the field of early childhood education, I have seen that quality early childhood education during the first five years of a child's life creates a critical foundation for academic achievement.

For 23 years, I have worked for *Children's Home + Aid* and its Early Childhood Care & Education programs targeting at-risk families in Chicago and the suburbs. I have found that children born in high-risk environments (defined by low income, young parental age, and low maternal education) face significant barriers to healthy development and learning. If these deficits are not addressed, these children will face a lifetime of obstacles that will lead to poor academic performance.

Children's Home + Aid has taken a major step forward in setting new benchmarks for early childhood education with the introduction of a new initiative. We have partnered with doctors Craig and Sharon Ramey (Georgetown University) to implement the findings of their 30 years of groundbreaking research in child development. The Ramey partnership offers the 600 children and families we serve daily the greatest opportunity for success.

All children are born with the same potential to become successful learners. Almost all healthy children test at the same developmental range up to age one. After that, significant differentials begin to appear in developmental tests, with children from high-risk backgrounds showing developmental deficits.

Ameliorating these deficits, or preventing them in the first place, remains our mission.

Karen Selman
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