

# The Fresno Bee

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## Editorial: Early education key to success

A public investment in quality preschool programs can pay off for a lifetime for the students and for the taxpayers in reduced reliance on public services.

Research shows that young children have an immense potential for learning, and those with quality preschool experiences have an advantage over those who don't attend preschool. This is especially true for children coming from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

And if you can combine quality preschool with increased parental involvement, the chances of education success improve dramatically.

In Fresno County, school officials have been talking a lot about preschool and parental involvement, and that emphasis is beginning to pay off in the classroom.

Fresno County Schools Superintendent Larry Powell has gotten \$600,000 in grants in the past two years from the Packard Foundation to improve preschool programs and parent involvement in teaching young children.

A news story in The Bee last week outlined the successful program in the Pacific Union Elementary School District, where preschool and

parent involvement are being pushed. The district's superintendent, Warren Jennings, said students were arriving each year less prepared for kindergarten. The school system decided more focus needs to be on children before they reached kindergarten "so the parents know what's expected and we know what parents need from us," according to Jennings.

A crucial part of the message is that parents are their children's first teachers. "Preschool can absolutely occur in the home with mom or grandma," said Wilma Hashimoto, associate director of early care and education with the Fresno County Office of Education.

It's clear from the San Joaquin Valley's terrible dropout rates that more needs to be done earlier in the education process to give children a chance to be successful in school. If they show up in kindergarten already behind their peers, it's often difficult to catch up.

The schools and the community need to do all they can to get at-risk students off the dropout track. Quality preschool programs and encouraging parental involvement can help children be successful in the classroom.