

**Rochester Area Foundation - News & Publications****Quote of the Moment...**

I skate to where the puck is going to be, not where it is.

~Wayne Gretzky~

**Rochester council backs First Steps**

*By Jeff Pieters*

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A \$4 million initiative to improve early childhood education in Rochester has a \$100,000 pledge from the Rochester City Council. Council members agreed to support the initiative, called First Steps, as a way to improve young students' readiness for school and, in the long run, save the city money on costs associated with failed education outcomes such as public assistance and criminal prosecution.

"If they (students) are successful at school, success begets success," said Al DeBoer, representing the Rochester Area Foundation, the organization promoting First Steps.

The foundation will work to coordinate groups, including the public schools, child-care agencies and the United Way in an effort to reorganize and bring vitality to the task of making sure all five- and six-year-olds enter school as ready to learn as possible.

DeBoer said an estimated 60 percent of children are entering Rochester kindergartens "not ready" for school, and 12 percent are at or on the verge of being "at risk" for serious failure. He cited recent studies indicating that significant investments in early childhood education repay themselves 18 times over in avoided costs and societal benefits.

The city, which cannot legally donate taxpayers' money to charity, is treating the contribution as a contractual arrangement with First Steps.

DeBoer said the city will be one of several "collaborative partners" in First Steps. Other contributors include Mayo Clinic, which earlier this month committed \$650,000 to the initiative.

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