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Quote of the Moment...

Many people are capable of doing a wise thing, more a cunning thing, but very few a generous thing.

~Alexander Pope ~

First Steps is a sound investment all the way around

By Paul Fleissner

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I am excited about the possibilities the First Steps Initiative will bring to families and child care providers in our community. Minnesota has the largest percentage of families with both spouses working in the nation.

Families are busy. Child care providers are extremely important to our working families. The First Steps project will provide tools and resources to families and child care providers that will help our kids learn.

This is not a mandatory government program. First Steps is aiming to help families and child care providers with resources that make the jobs of parenting and child care easier. As a parent who has used child care, I think this is wonderful. Research shows that 75 percent of all brain development occurs before the age of 5. Parents worry that their kids are in an environment that is rich in high quality learning experiences.

First Steps will help make that happen in our community.

A school readiness project benefits the school district, but the community bottom line improves too. Art Rolnick, VP Federal Reserve Bank in Minneapolis, says that research shows a 10 percent to 16 percent return on investment. Kids who are ready for school are more likely to pay taxes when they grow up and less likely to engage in behavior that has a social cost like delinquency. We currently have eight kids in Red Wing at a cost of \$40,000 per year.

Our workforce is aging. The Rochester Area Foundation through the First Steps Project recognizes that these kids are the workforce of the future. Most of the children who enter the systems I work with have problems and challenges that cost a lot of resources.

First Steps is not a cure, but many kids will have opportunities to avoid our institutional systems (child protection, children's mental health, and probation) and be productive, tax-paying adults.

Please support this project. To learn more about the First Steps Initiative go to the Web site at www.FirstSteps.us.

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