

**Rochester Area Foundation - News & Publications****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 ~

**Kindergarten initiative soon pays for itself**

By [Joshua Lynsen](#)

Wed, Sep 7, 2005

Art Rolnick wasn't sure what he'd find by calculating the economic benefits of early-childhood education.

But the federal economist, who works in Minneapolis, was amazed at what added up. Rolnick said he conservatively calculated an annual return of 16 percent. Smart kids become smart employees, and companies want smart employees.

"The market is very clear," he said. "They want educated employees -- and they're willing to pay."

Rolnick spoke Tuesday to supporters of First Steps, a kindergarten-readiness initiative created by the Rochester Area Foundation. He said initiatives like First Steps aren't just morally right, they're financially sound.

Rolnick said the benefits surface early and continue into adulthood. He said children who've received preschool education are less likely to fail first grade, are more likely to graduate and are among the most valuable employees.

First Steps will spend \$4 million in the next five years to prepare local children for school. The initiative seeks to make kindergarten readiness a community priority while strengthening family participation in early learning.

Rolnick said that while First Steps would help children in Olmsted County, he's encouraging state leaders to create a \$1.5 billion endowment to start a statewide initiative.

Rolnick said by combining the state's \$500 million education endowment with \$500 million in privately raised funds, then matching that with a Congressional contribution he's been assured would happen, children across Minnesota would benefit.

"It's not going to solve all problems, and I'm not saying it will," he said, "but that's the challenge."

People who heard Rolnick speak Tuesday supported his message. Rochester Superintendent Jerry Williams said such an endowment needs to happen. He said Minnesota must reassert its commitment to education.

Rep. Andy Welti, a Democrat from Plainview, said early-childhood education also benefit parents. He said the initiatives give adults and children a better chance to succeed, as families and individuals.

"These programs benefit the entire family," he said. "This is one of the wisest investments our state can make."

 [E-MAIL TO A FRIEND](#)[Close This Window](#)