

News Release 2010

January 21, 2010

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For more information, contact:

Peter Theisen, United Way of Whatcom County, ptheisen@unitedwaywhatcom.org, (360)733-8670

Erica Hallock, United Ways of Washington, ehallock.uwwa@sbims.com, (509) 991-2390

UNITED WAY TEAMS UP WITH LOCAL BUSINESS LEADERS TO ADVOCATE FOR EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMS

Bellingham---With funds from a grant awarded to United Ways of Washington from United Ways of America and the Buffet Early Childhood Fund, United Way of Whatcom County will be holding a breakfast for community business leaders on January 26 to engage their support of early learning programs. Early learning programs focus on childhood education from birth to 5-years-old, before children begin K-12 schooling.

“The thought behind this is that the human brain develops rapidly in young kids, and children that are engaged in early learning are more likely to be successful later on in life,” said Peter Theisen, President of United Way of Whatcom County.

The breakfast will bring together 12-15 local business leaders and will focus on the importance of early learning programs in the community. The event will invite the attending leaders to be advocates for early learning by encouraging them to convey the importance of the programs to the state Legislature. Theisen said he hopes to engage the business leaders by explaining the social and economic benefits of early education.

“Strong kids and strong families make for strong communities,” said Erica Hallock, Executive Director of United Ways of Washington. “The kids of today are the workforce of tomorrow.”

According to a report by Voices for America’s Children and the Child and Family Policy Center, 85 percent of the brain’s development occurs before age 5, but only 4 percent of America’s public investment in early childhood education is utilized by that age.

Studies have shown that children who receive early learning education achieve a positive outcome in education, health and income later in life.

“Early education is important in both the short and long run,” Hallock said. “It is important for children going into kindergarten to be ready to learn, but early education also builds long-term skills such as creativity, cooperation and communication. The skills built in those early years carry on throughout our adult life.”

There are several studies to back up the importance of early learning. Economist James Heckman found that when young children are educated early on, they show higher graduation rates, better job skills and a lower chance of criminal activities later in life. Research by the U.S. Federal Reserve Bank found that early learning programs could generate a 16 percent public rate of return.

“Educating the next generation early in their development will ultimately create a stronger, more vibrant economy,” Theisen said. Similar projects are taking place in Spokane and Bremerton, as well as other cities nationwide.

United Way of Whatcom County has worked for over 50 years to increase financial resources for local health and human service needs, and to seek and invest in community-building opportunities to improve the health and welfare of Whatcom County residents.

###