



## Trustee Talk

### Could Preschool become “universal” in California?

By Trustee Kerri Mariner, Banning Unified School District, Trustee Area #3

Nobel Laureate economist James Heckman says every dollar spent on preschool, especially for at-risk students, eventually yields up to \$7 in benefits to society.

Preschoolers exposed to high-quality, early childhood education are more likely to attend college, earn more, grow up healthier, and stay out of trouble. It’s clearly a rate of return that would make even Warren Buffet envious, according to the *Los Angeles Times*.

As a school board member, I endorse these findings and believe that investing in preschool will pay big dividends to the Banning Unified School District.

<http://www.banning.k12.ca.us/District-Administration/School-Board/Kerri-Mariner-Trustee/index.html>

#### Universal Preschool in California

We’re looking forward to the State Legislature voting on a new budget in June that could *eventually* lay the

groundwork for universal preschool for every four-year-old in California.

“It is a priority of the Administration that all children have access to a high-quality preschool program before they begin kindergarten,” says a line from the new “California for All” state budget.

If the Legislature approves money for Universal Preschool, the program would start next fall by first enrolling low-income students. The low-income students would attend state preschools run by their local school districts like our Florida Street Discovery Center. The youngsters would be enrolled over the next three years in a phased-in approach.

The new budget also calls for expanding universal preschool to *every* student in California — regardless of family income. But no specific timeline has been set.

In our District, the nurturing and enlightening of young minds begins the moment our students enter Florida Street Discovery Center, a transitional kindergarten and state-licensed preschool. Preschoolers in our hands-on learning program use the kindergarten-readiness curriculum, "Big Day for PreK."

### **A child's brain develops rapidly**

Meanwhile, scientific research continues to shed light on the importance of investing in early childhood education.

About 90 percent of a child's brain development occurs by age five—before they enter kindergarten, according to *First Things First*, an advocacy group in Arizona. Numerous studies show that children are more prepared for kindergarten if they're exposed to quality early learning programs. These youngsters have better language skills, more vocabulary, greater math and social skills, more positive relationships with classmates and score higher on school-readiness tests, according to *First Things First*.

Parents, caregivers, and other adults in a child's life play a vital role in brain development. When you're interacting with a child, you're

literally "building" their brain. That's why experts say it's so important to talk, sing, read, and play with young children from the moment of birth.

### **More than a lottery**

The economist Heckman factors social science into his research. He famously observed:

*"Some kids win the lottery at birth; far too many don't—and most people have a hard time catching up over the rest of their lives."*

In Banning Unified, education must be about the future of our students and the world around us.

We need to invest in early childhood education, especially preschool. The rewards are unimaginable. Education shouldn't be a lottery or an accident of birth. We must empower *every* student to discover a future of opportunity and personal fulfillment.