



Right and Smart™

ADVANCING EARLY CHILD DEVELOPMENT IN WEST VIRGINIA

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State Leaders Recommend Heightened Emphasis on Early Child Programming as *Right, Smart* Thing to Do

Imagine West Virginia study calls for enhanced childcare, in-home visitation services

Morgantown, W.Va. – Focusing resources on early childhood policies and programs – specifically for the birth-to-3 age group – not only will produce a healthier population but will offer economic benefits to West Virginia in the form of a more competitive 21st century workforce. That is the focus of **IMAGINE WEST VIRGINIA’S 2009** policy statement ***Right and Smart: Advancing Early Child Development in West Virginia***.

Admiral T. Joseph Lopez, USN (retired), the chairman of **IMAGINE WEST VIRGINIA’S** Board of Governors, urges West Virginians to review the report and support its recommendations.

“**IMAGINE WEST VIRGINIA** believes it is vital, even in these times of economic uncertainty, that we provide every West Virginia child with the best chance for a healthy, productive life,” Lopez said. “It is both the right and smart thing to do. Our research clearly demonstrates that investments in quality programs for our youngest citizens will yield significant dividends, and over time produce economic benefits that will far exceed the cost of investment.”

Former Gov. Gaston Caperton, president of College Board and an **IMAGINE WEST VIRGINIA** Board member, said the declaration speaks for itself.

“Early child investments are among the smartest economic development investments that any state can make,” Caperton said.

IMAGINE WEST VIRGINIA has distributed an open letter to state policy leaders urging their support of this issue and offering two specific, research-based recommendations that are parts of a series of steps West Virginia must take to reach the ultimate goal of creating a cohesive, comprehensive plan for early child development.

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The recommendations include:

- 1) Advance a system of early childcare which is available, affordable, and adheres to a Quality Rating & Improvement System;**
- 2) Create a comprehensive system of in-home family education across the entire state, providing quality parenting assistance both before birth and in the first years of life.**

With more mothers joining the workforce to help support their families and the number of West Virginia child care centers on the decline, access to **quality child care** that is accessible and affordable is critically important. West Virginia also must ensure families facing obstacles have access to high-quality **home visitation services** as part of a comprehensive and coordinated support system that nurtures their child's healthy development.

"**IMAGINE WEST VIRGINIA** recognizes that West Virginia has received national recognition for its success with the State Children's Health Insurance Program and in the adoption of a pre-kindergarten for 4-year olds," said Sally Richardson, executive director for the West Virginia Institute for Health Policy Research and an **IMAGINE WEST VIRGINIA** Board member. "However, we believe the state has a unique opportunity to continue such activity on behalf of our children and improve in other critical areas, such as the birth-to-three age group."

IMAGINE WEST VIRGINIA prepared the report with the input and guidance of a number of people from health and human resources, higher education, non-profits, law, business, and local, state, and federal governments. Dr. Calvin Kent of the Marshall University Center for Business and Economic Research (CBER) and Barbara Gebhard of ZERO TO THREE were the principal advisors to the project.

IMAGINE WEST VIRGINIA is a results-based policy institute of West Virginians serving West Virginia. Established in 2006 as an independent, nonpartisan, objective research and development entity, **IMAGINE WEST VIRGINIA** is dedicated to identifying and investigating tough public policy issues and publishing well-reasoned, evidence-based recommendations that have the potential to transform the economy of the state and the lives of West Virginians.

The 2009 policy statement – ***Right and Smart: Advancing Early Child Development in West Virginia*** – can be found online at www.imaginewestvirginia.com.

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