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## Early childhood education advocates rally against budget cuts

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The Wichita Eagle

WICHITA — Advocates of early childhood education programs gathered outside a Wichita child care center this morning to rally against budget cuts.

"Investing in early childhood is not only the right thing to do, it's the economically responsible thing to do," said Gary Brunk, president and chief executive officer of Kansas Action for Children.

More than 100 parents, teachers, local leaders and children greeted the "Keeping the Promise" bus tour as it stopped outside TOP North Early Childhood Center, 2330 N. Opportunity Drive.

The tour is being hosted by Kansas Action for Children and the Kansas Coalition for School Readiness. It was designed to raise awareness about the importance of programs such as Early Head Start, Parents as Teachers, Smart Start and pre- kindergarten.

"Proposals at the Statehouse right now could slash millions of dollars from the state's most successful early childhood programs," Brunk said. "The best way we can keep this shortterm financial problem from becoming a long-term crisis is to invest in Kansas kids."

Children gathered to greet the tour bus held posters that read, "Keep the promise," "I'm the future of Kansas" and "Because I'm worth it."

Jon Rolph, executive vice president of Sasnak Management, a restaurant company, said employers eventually reap the benefits of high-quality child care and preschool programs.

"Everything they learn in these early years are the same skills we businesses look for," Rolph said. "Confidence, self-esteem, communication skills ... playing well with others."

Janice Smith, executive director of the Opportunity Project, or TOP, pointed to studies that show such programs help low-income students enter schools more prepared to learn.

"If we put Kansas children on the right path from the very beginning, they'll stay on that path," she said. "And one of the ways is through early childhood programs."

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