The competitiveness of small, medium and large companies depends on having a pipeline of talented, educated employees with the skills needed in today’s economy:

- Problem-solving
- Communication
- Decision-making
- Critical thinking
- Motivation
- Collaboration

In Arizona, as in most of the United States, we don’t have enough workers with the skills that employers need. Nearly half the American workforce lacks the basic education and communication skills required to get a job and advance. One quarter of Arizona’s students don’t graduate from high school.

That’s the bad news. The good news is that we know how to solve this problem.

90% of critical brain development occurs before kindergarten. The skills and abilities employers are looking for — focus, self-discipline, motivation and collaboration — all start to take root in the first five years of life.

The ROI from quality early education programs for children birth to age 5 is well established and quantifiable. Study after study demonstrates returns ranging from 4x to 16x, depending on the program analyzed, with strong, positive effects on:

- Kindergarten readiness
- Language, math and social skills
- K-12 test scores
- High school graduation
- College enrollment

Investing in quality early childhood programs for infants, toddlers and preschoolers is the only proven strategy to produce such returns. It also correlates strongly to less crime and less dependence on social services later in life.

The bottom line is clear:

- Quality early childhood education for children birth to age 5 increases school readiness, which leads to workforce readiness.
- Allocating resources to support the health and learning of our young children is a critical economic development strategy.
We know the importance of early childhood.
But don’t take our word for it:

**U.S. Chamber of Commerce**
“(T)he capacity for developmental skills begins in the first five years of life. This is the beginning point for a person's creativity, communication, team working, problem-solving and critical thinking skills.”

**The Committee for Economic Development**
“Business leaders and policymakers should consider investment in young children one of the most effective strategies to secure the future economic strength of their communities and the nation.”

**The Business Roundtable**
“America’s continuing efforts to improve education and develop a world-class workforce will be hampered without a commitment to early childhood education.”

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**What can you do?**
The voice of business leaders like you is crucial to Arizona’s economic future.

1. **CONNECT**
   with First Things First in your Arizona community to learn more and join the early childhood movement.

2. **SUPPORT**
high-quality early learning programs in your area.

3. **ADOPT**
policies in your business that support working parents.

4. **TELL**
policymakers that you support public investment in early childhood.

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A statewide organization created by Arizona voters, First Things First partners with communities to give all Arizona children the opportunity to arrive at kindergarten healthy and ready to succeed.