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NM Study Finds Taxpayers Willing To Pay More For Public Early Childhood Programs

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ALBUQUERQUE - New Mexico residents want to see more programs that help all young children get head starts, in learning and in life – and they're willing to help pay for it, according to the findings from a series of daylong focus groups held in communities across the state.

Heidi Gantwerk is vice president of *Viewpoint Learning*, which compiled the results. She says one widely-supported program is universal pre-kindergarten available to all families.

"There is a sense that just because people hit below a certain income threshold didn't mean they should or shouldn't be eligible; and people wanted to see these programs available to all New Mexicans, everyone could benefit and saw the state benefiting as a whole."

The focus groups, dubbed "dialogues," were held with random samples of residents in Albuquerque, Espanola, Farmington, Laguna Pueblo, and Las Cruces. Gantwerk says they included people from very different backgrounds, who were able to find common ground and agree on the importance of supporting early learning programs.

She says most group members were surprised at how little money is currently spent on early childhood programs. They also discussed the kinds of programs they would like to see, and even how they would be willing to pay for them.

"Once they had a say in the kinds of things they thought were important, they talked about what they would be willing to support financially."

To maintain the early childhood services, groups discussed tax increases they felt they could support, including alcohol and tobacco taxes, and taxing high-income earners and out-of-state corporations earning profits in New Mexico, as well as looking for ways local communities could chip in. The summary of results is online at http://ourvoicesourchildren.org/CG_findingsChoice.html.

Eric Mack, Public News Service - NM



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