

# Helping Durham County students – from birth to college

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**By Bill Bryant, Guest Columnist**

Many of us have heard people say that it is unfortunate that babies do not come with instruction manuals. I would like to respectfully disagree with this statement, and here's why.

Just as every child is different so is every baby. Each human life comes with its own package of personalized needs. But what we know all too well from years of early childhood research are which supports must be put in place to ensure that young children grow up to enter kindergarten ready to learn, and to ensure that they will not get left behind to fail academically and in life.

We know that it is a community effort to provide high-quality early learning environments, health and early intervention supports, and family programs that offer assistance in raising children who will be successful learners and leaders.

The challenge remains to define the best strategies to bring the knowledge we have about brain development and economic investment through early childhood education to our legislators and the general public.

James Heckman, a Nobel Laureate in Economics, states that "Early childhood education fosters cognitive skills along with attentiveness, motivation, self-control and sociability – the character skills that turn knowledge into know-how and people into productive citizens."

Equipping our children with those skills early on ensures they will be ready.

We want the community to come together and to rally for the education of our children, for an investment in our future, because we all know that there are instructions, and we must fund what we know produces outcomes for our future.

For more than 15 years, Durham's Partnership for Children and its many collaborators has worked to implement programs that strengthen families and support young children to become productive citizens. We have shared our knowledge, we have shared our expertise and we are poised to continue this work despite the ongoing budget cuts that challenge us.

This Election Day (Nov. 8<sup>th</sup>), Durham County voters will have the opportunity to consider a quarter-cent sales tax that would provide an estimated \$9 million addition per year to Durham County's investment in public education.

What this vote means for Durham – if passed – is that Durham Public Schools will be able to maintain jobs for 150 teachers and school-based personnel as well as offset the cost of school construction, Durham Technical Community College will be able to provide work-study funds and grants for recent DPS graduates, and the Partnership will be able to better serve pre-kindergarten children in Durham County.

Approximately 50 percent of the tax will be paid by people living outside the county – commuters who work in Durham but live in other counties. Many necessities will not be taxed, including food, prescriptions, housing, utilities, motor vehicles, and gas.

Locally, the entire spectrum of education, from birth to college, will benefit. Even more, our children – our future – will receive their solid foundation. It is crucial that all Durham County voters go to the polls on November 8<sup>th</sup> to express their views on this issue. We ask that Durham voters consider what it means to invest in programs that produce real outcomes for all children.

**Bill Bryant is chairman of the Durham's Partnership for Children Board of Directors.**