

**Editorial**

## Pre-school still is key for children

Once upon a time, in an era far, far away, children went to kindergarten to prepare for first grade. Kindergarten was their first school experience, their prep for elementary school.

Now, children need to go to pre-school to prepare for kindergarten.

"It's an unfortunate fact that about one in five children in Virginia start kindergarten without the necessary skill-set required for this structured learning environment," Scott Hippert, president of the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation, said in a news release.

In their first five years of life, children are forming important neurological connections — "strengthening" their brains — and creating a platform for further education for the rest of their lives. The "higher" the platform, the better the boost and the more they will be able to learn from that point on.

This learning platform applies not just to the ability to absorb facts but also to the ability to comprehend, and then to create.

Early childhood also provides the "building blocks" for a child's social skills.

All these skills combine to develop, eventually, young people who are ready to take their place in the workforce as productive and innovative employees.

It is an important time for children and their families, at any socioeconomic level. But the gains from pre-school education can be especially dramatic for children who don't receive many learning tools at home.

"Quality early education for at-risk children can produce an annual rate of return as high as sixteen percent — higher than most stock portfolios," said Art Rolnick, senior vice president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, quoted by the Pew Center on the States.

At any level, parents can do many things to help well prepare their children for learning and for interacting with others. A few listed by the VECF:

» Adjust bedtimes during the school year so that children get enough sleep and still get up early enough to have a nutritious breakfast.

» Encourage young children to have "listening" ears, "walking" feet and "indoor" voices, to follow direction and to treat others with respect — behaviors that are expected at school and in public.

» Read aloud to young children every day, especially books with rhyming texts and big, colorful pictures.

» Play simple, fun and instructional games with young children. Such games can help children identify names, shapes and colors and even give them a head start on math and reading.

» Plan fun outings with educational content, such as to the library, park or a petting zoo.

No doubt about it, pre-school is a proven boost to childhood learning, one that provides momentum for success throughout school and throughout life. That's no fairytale.

Still, along with the state's focus on early childhood education and the need to start children off right, we must add another emphasis: plain, old-fashioned fun. Non-structured play. Childhood freedom. Time to daydream. Time to simply be a kid.

The value of early childhood education is high-stakes ... but it should not feel high-stakes to children themselves. Encouraging growth is one thing, but putting too much pressure on young children replaces joyful growth with a fear of learning that is counterproductive.

Is that a tough line for parents to walk? Maybe. But it's worth getting it right, for children's success and happiness.



IN AN EFFORT TO STIFLE DISSENT, SYRIAN GOVERNMENT THUGS KIDNAP, BEAT UP AND BREAK ONE CARTOONIST'S HANDS,

### Letters to the Editor

## Finding flaws in Panetta's plan

Leon Panetta, who holds the position that we used to more usefully call "secretary of war," makes a weak case ("Panetta: Bigger defense cuts would 'weaken' U.S.," The Daily Progress, Aug. 17).

Panetta considers \$350 billion over 10 years, or \$35 billion per year, to be serious cuts to the national security budget.

But consider the budget from which that is to be cut. It includes, each year, about \$545 billion for the "base" military budget, at least \$200 billion extra each year for wars (Panetta uses Afghanistan and Libya as reasons not to cut spending, and Congress has never yet appropriated a dime for Libya), \$71 billion for homeland security, \$19 billion for nuclear weapons, \$8 billion for a miscellaneous Pentagon slush fund, \$53 billion (that we know of) for spying and secret operations agencies, \$129 billion for veterans, \$18 billion for military aid and other foreign affairs, \$68 billion for pensions, \$185 billion for debt interest, and additional major budgets for the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development. (Panetta has also cited the State Department as a concern.)

In other words, we're talking about subtracting \$35 billion from well over a trillion. That's a cut of less than 3.5 percent.

China spends about \$114 billion per

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year on its military. No other nation spends anything remotely close to that.

Let's generously assume there are enough hidden costs in China's budget to double it to \$228 billion. And let's assume that we must spend twice as much as they do, because ... well, just because we're we and they're they. Now we're at \$456 billion.

How do we get from there to Panetta describing a U.S. security budget of \$965 billion as the lowest we can safely go, and a budget of \$950 billion as

"doomsday"?

Is the danger here really and truly to the people of this country?

Or is it the threat to the profits of the weapons makers that has Panetta panicking? Does that motivation also explain the Pentagon's desire to cut benefits to troops rather than weaponry?

**DAVID SWANSON**  
Charlottesville

#### Rep. Ron Paul deserves some campaigning recognition, too

In the aftermath of the Iowa straw poll, I was aghast at the indifferent attitude displayed by the general media toward Rep. Ron Paul's showing.

He was edged out only by the front-runner, Michele Bachmann.

What do the media take us Americans for, when just about all of them egregiously downplay the facts by making it appear that only Rick Perry, Michele Bachmann and Mitt Romney are now the focus of attention as the major contenders? By their action, the national media seem to be making a conscious effort (for whatever reasons) to be forging Rep. Paul as a non-person in this early stage of the run for the Republican nomination for president.

**JOHN E. PUTALIK**  
Albemarle County

## Martin Luther King's vision of justice

WASHINGTON — As the nation honors the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. with a stirring new memorial on the National Mall, let's not obscure one of his most important messages in a fog of sentiment. Justice, he told us, is not just a legal or moral question but a matter of economics as well.

In this sense, we're not advancing toward the fulfillment of King's dream. We're heading in the opposite direction.

Aug. 28, the day organizers chose for the dedication of the King memorial (the ceremony was postponed because of Hurricane Irene), is the anniversary of the 1963 march and rally at which King delivered the indelible "I Have a Dream" speech. That event — one of the watershed moments of 20th-century America — was officially called the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. Meaningful employment was a front-and-center demand.

The idea and impetus for the march came from A. Philip Randolph, one of the most important labor leaders in the nation's history. Randolph founded the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, a union that demanded and won decent pay and better working conditions for thousands of railroad employees, most of them African-American. By



**Eugene Robinson**

1963, Randolph had become a vice president of the AFL-CIO labor federation.

King and his fellow civil rights leaders understood the importance of good jobs that paid a living wage — and the social and economic mobility such jobs provide — in forging a nation that honors its promise of fairness and equality. If he and Randolph were alive today, given the devastating blows that poor and working-class Americans have suffered, I'm confident they'd be planning a March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom II.

As an African-American old enough to remember Jim Crow segregation in the South, I'm amazed at the progress toward racial justice. We're not all the way there yet, but we're light-years from where we started.

King was a passionate advocate for economic justice, speaking not just for African-Americans but for all Americans seeking to pull themselves out of poverty and dysfunction. On this score, we haven't just failed to make sufficient progress. We've stopped trying.

With unemployment

above 9 percent, what task absorbs our elected leaders? Certainly not an urgent search for ways to put people back to work. Instead, we're obsessed with deficit-reduction measures that, if applied in the short term, would destroy jobs rather than create them.

Look beyond the recession. Between the end of World War II and the end of the Vietnam War, the typical income for an American household roughly doubled (in inflation-adjusted dollars). Since then, the Economist magazine noted last year, income for a typical household rose by just 22 percent — and even this modest increase was due to the fact that women entered the work force in large numbers. The Pew Research Center found that if you look just at men in their 30s, they earned 12 percent less in 2004 (again, inflation-adjusted) than their fathers did at a similar age.

As everyone knows by now, the top 1 percent of earners captures an increasing share of national income. The rich, without a doubt, are getting richer. The middle class and the working class are seeing their incomes stagnate or fall. The federal minimum wage of \$7.25 an hour is an outrage. Food, clothing, housing and transportation on \$7.25 an hour? There aren't enough hours in the week.

It's no coincidence that this massive transfer of wealth — basically, from workers to investors — took place at a time when union membership was in steep decline. In 1983, according to the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics, 20.1 percent of wage and salary workers belonged to a union. In 2010, only 11.9 percent were union members.

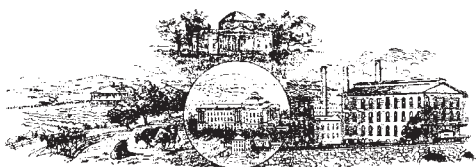
The result? In 2010, the median weekly pay of a male worker over 25 who belonged to a union was \$982, according to BLS. The comparable figure for a worker not represented by a union was \$846.

King was assassinated in Memphis, where he was supporting the demands of sanitation workers for more pay, better working conditions and the right to unionize.

The civil rights leader was increasingly focused on the economic dimension of the freedom struggle, and was planning a massive Poor People's Campaign at the time of his death.

The new King memorial is inspirational. When I visited last week, the crowd of visitors was large, diverse and generally awestruck at the memorial's simplicity and power. Once again, the great man stands in Washington to challenge our morality, our faith and our conscience.

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