

NEW HAMPSHIRE UNION LEADER

Another View

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Another View -- Fred Kocher: Let's provide a spark for NH kids

By FRED KOCHER

As the 2016 election season draws to a close, New Hampshire public officials will begin to transition into a governing mode, and work will begin to develop the next state operating budget. Throughout the course of the election, candidates for governor and other state offices had the opportunity to address important issues related to children's health and well-being that should be part of our upcoming governing session.

Fortunately, Spark NH, our state's early childhood advisory council, has a road map for how to ensure New Hampshire children and their families are healthy, learning and thriving now and well into the future. Spark's Framework for Action for New Hampshire's Young Children identifies a set of policy priorities that lawmakers and citizens alike can rely on to measure our state's progress in providing the best opportunities for our children for early and lifelong health.

Because the brain is built from the bottom up, with strong foundations essential to later physical, cognitive and emotional well-being, we must ensure that early environments are working to support strong foundations. That means assuring that families have the basic resources and supports they need to provide for their children, from housing and energy assistance to fair wages. It is also why it is essential that children have equal opportunity to participate in effective learning opportunities in all settings, including child care, after school programs, preschools and elementary schools from birth through the primary grades. Ensuring that our most vulnerable citizens have access to programs that will allow them to have happy and healthy lives is vital to the continued prosperity of our state.

We must also safeguard access to affordable health care for families, and strengthen New Hampshire's capacity to promote healthy social and emotional development for infants, toddlers, other young children and their families. Part of that effort would require developing and expanding community-based programs that can prevent or reduce toxic stress, such as violence, crime, abuse, neglect, substance abuse and severe caregiver mental illness, and ensure effective

treatment for those who need it.

All of these goals require several strategies to be successful: They must rely on evidence-based practices that ensure children are benefiting from the strongest research; our schools and agencies must work together to improve program effectiveness; and we must have the support of our elected officials to ensure that our children's success is their priority.

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- See more at: <http://www.unionleader.com/Another-View-Fred-Kocher-Lets-provide-a-spark-for-NH-kids-11082016&template=mobileart#sthash.322am4EO.dpuf>