

## Rally for early childhood education catches attention of lawmakers

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**WICHITA, Kansas** – Parents, children and educators are rallying to save early childhood education programs in Kansas as lawmakers look to do even more cutting to balance the state budget.

A morning rally in Wichita was one of just seven across the state today. Concerned citizens say the programs are necessary and save the state a lot more in the long run.

With the state budget nearly \$500 million in the red, Wichita residents came out Friday to tell lawmakers early education programs should not be cut to balance the budget.



“It’s just too important,” said Kelly Zens.

Zens knows how hard it is to make ends meet in this struggling economy. She’s been laid off and is depending on her husband’s income to support the family.

“We’re making all sorts of cuts to survive in this economy, and this is the last place I want to see the State of Kansas making cuts,” she said.

Supporters say programs like Head Start, preschool and Parents as Teachers are essential for the economy. They point to one recent study that found kids who don’t get access to early childhood education are 70 percent more likely to be arrested for violent crimes before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. And with the average cost of yearly incarceration at \$80,000 per inmate, they say funding these programs is a big money saver.

Some lawmakers are listening.

“In budget times you have to prioritize and the most important priority for Kansas is educating the future generation of Kansans, so education is the top priority,” said Democratic Representative Jim Ward.

If the cuts go through, some programs will see a 34 percent cut in their funding.

“I’m going to stand up every chance I get and tell my colleagues we cannot cut any more from education,” said Democratic Senator Oletha Faust-Goudeau.

“As a family, we would definitely support increasing taxes to support education,” Zens said. “In the long run it just makes more sense.”

Supporters also say such cuts are actually affecting our nation’s military strength. A recent federal study found that 75 percent of young people are unable to enlist because they fail to graduate high school, have a criminal record or are physically unfit.

Rallies were also held in Hutchinson, Junction City and Salina today.

