

# HEADLIGHT

## His Kidz lobbies for early childhood ed.

'Get on the bus'

Terry Meyers, For the Headlight

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From left are His Kidz Learning Center students Destiny Villegas,...  
(Terry Meyers/Headlight Photo)

When Brenda Villegas began her career as an early childhood educator she did not think she would see the day that she would have to fight so hard for early education funding.

"The state of New Mexico is failing our children and they are not getting their fair opportunity for early education," said Villegas, owner of His Kidz Learning Center in Deming.

Community members, parents, educators and owners of early childhood education centers from across the state will head to the Roundhouse in Santa Fe on Thursday to lobby for permanent school funding.

It will be a day of action to restore funding for all children and to expand access for parents and children for quality early childhood education.

In the next few weeks New Mexico legislators will have an opportunity to support school children with two joint resolutions; SJR 9 and HJR 15 are now working their way through legislative committees. These resolutions will allow New Mexico voters to invest a small percentage of the state's school permanent fund in early childhood education programs.

Last year 62 early childhood education centers closed throughout the state and over 6,000 students of pre-school age were displaced.

Early childhood education starts at six weeks to 5 years of age. It has been proven that this is the time brain development begins.

Early childhood education centers are a place for children to learn their ABCs, numbers, shapes and how to socialize before they reach public school. Children that attend early childhood education centers are introduced to books that they may not be exposed to at home where both parents may be working full-time jobs.

In 1910 permanent funding was created in New Mexico to give free education to all children.

"It is the middle class children who are losing out," Villegas said.

2001 was the last time early educators saw a raise. In 2010, a four percent cut was spread across the board. In January of this year, the four percent was reinstated.

Centers across the state are feeling the same financial issues so many other businesses are feeling. Electric bills continue to increase, insurance for these centers have gone up. The cost of basic schools supplies have almost doubled and the cost of feeding the children breakfast and lunch has dramatically increased.

"New Mexico is rated 50th in education," Villegas noted. "Last year we were 49th, so early education is very important."

Early Educators United will be sponsoring a bus to take people to Santa Fe with lunch being provided. The community is welcome to participate. The bus will leave at 6:30 a.m., on Thursday from His Kidz at 704 S .Zinc St., and will return the same day at 7 p.m.. For more information, call (575)544-7522.