



Parents of young children talk with U.S. Rep. Bob Latta, R-Bowling Green, about the importance of funding early childhood education Wednesday afternoon during the congressman's visit to the Stricker Family Development Center in Fremont. / Mark Tower/News-Messenger

FREMONT -- "Don't you forget about us."

Those were the final words Tim Crosser, a local father of two, left with U.S. Rep. Bob Latta, R-Bowling Green, who visited with parents and child care staff at the WSOS Stricker Family Development Center on Wednesday.

Crosser, who has a 7-year-old daughter and a 5-year-old son, said he has been impressed with how well WSOS Head Start program staff work with children and parents to teach behavioral and parenting skills and, ideally, foster development of strong and healthy families.

"Head Start is a family," he said. "I hope people like Robert Latta remember that when they meet in their committees and start talking budgets."

Latta said he is staying busy this month touring hospitals and factories and speaking with constituents across the 16 counties in his district. Speaking with staff, he said, it was obvious how important it was to them for early childhood education systems like the local Head Start program to receive continued funding.

"For the parents, they have seen their kids have a jump-start for their education," Latta said. "If kids get the good fundamentals at the very beginning, they have that foundation for their entire lives."

Tina Marker, a public relations advisor for Ohio's Head Start Association, said she definitely sees new threats to early childhood education funding.

"The funding is very threatened," Marker said. "Everything is on the chopping block right now."

She stressed that getting local parents -- like the three attending Wednesday's meeting -- involved in their children's education is the most crucial piece of giving kids the head start they need.

Crystal Walker, of Fremont, has six children and said she has noticed a considerable difference in those who went through the Stricker Center's Head Start program. Her two oldest children, Walker said, are enrolled in college, an accomplishment she attributes, at least in part, to the educational jump start they received from the program.

"It has definitely made a difference," she said. "We still need the funding to continue for the education of our children."

Ohio Head Start Association President Barb Haxton said the Head Start investment prepares children through age 5 to be solid learners in kindergarten and elementary school.

"Better educated kids are more likely to become productive members of society," Haxton said.

Heather Bigelow, of Fremont, has a 9-year-old and a 6-year-old. She said she came Wednesday to share her success story with Latta and to ask him to help keep program's like Fremont's Head Start going.

Crosser said he hopes the country's leaders will hear the pleas of average parents, like himself, to support educational programs, especially for families with low and moderate income levels.

"What I am hoping to accomplish," he said, "is to make sure funding continues for the families into the future so my kids can have a better future."

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