Educators gather for kindergarten summit

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CANFIELD

Kindergarten is the foundation upon which a child's education is built.

"We want to establish a strong foundation for children," said Valora Washington, founder and president of Community Advocates for Young Learners Institute.

"If we don't made a firm foundation, it will be very expensive to repair."

Washington was the keynote speaker Wednesday at the Eastern Ohio P-16 Partnership for Education Kindergarten Readiness Summit at Mahoning County Career and Technical Center.

Early-childhood educators, kindergarten teachers, school administrators and behavioral-development specialists from Ashtabula, Mahoning, Trumbull and Columbiana counties attended the summit.

Washington also suggested something that may be contrary to popular thinking.

"Let's stop retaining kindergarten children," she said to applause from the crowd.

Research shows that when children are retained in kindergarten, their parents and teachers have lower expectations for them, Washington said.

Those children also more often drop out of high school later, she said.

While proponents may believe that retaining kindergarten children helps those children, Washington said the research indicates the opposite.

"The research, in fact, shows that it hurts children," she said.

P-16, which denotes education from preschool through college, aims to foster post-secondary success and career readiness by creating a seamless education system that "is student-centered, high-performing and continually responsive to community need," its brochure says.

Wednesday's summit was sponsored by PNC Bank, the Raymond John Wean Foundation, MCCTC and the United Way of Youngstown and Mahoning Valley's Success By 6.

A panel presentation included principals Robert Walls, Scott Taylor and Chris Gibowitz, of Campbell, Lakeview and Willard Elementary schools, respectively; Kathie Marando of Community Solutions Association, Gary Baughman of D&E Counseling Center and Zana Vincent of the Ohio Department of Education, talking about the challenges they see in addressing kindergarten.

"Children are coming to kindergarten at all different levels," Marando said.