



May 7, 2010

The Honorable Tom Harkin, Chairman
Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin:

The business leaders of AMERICA'S EDGE work to strengthen businesses and the economy through proven investments in children and youth. These leaders know that one of the most effective ways to protect America's competitive edge in a global marketplace and build a foundation for sustained economic security is through these investments. **As you prepare to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), we urge you to consider two important reforms and investments that will ensure businesses have a workforce with the 21st century knowledge, skills and abilities we need: (1) New dedicated Title I funding to expand access to high-quality early education, and (2) improved data collection on—and meaningful accountability for—high school graduation rates.**

Ensuring high-quality early care and education programs for all children in America is critical to sustaining and strengthening businesses, the economy and communities. Investing in early learning will generate billions of dollars in sales of goods and services for businesses across the country and create hundreds of thousands of jobs. In fact, for every dollar invested in early learning in the U.S., nearly \$2 is generated in additional spending in state and local economies. Research confirms that investments in early learning are as high or higher than investments in other sectors, including construction, manufacturing, transportation and utilities.

Moreover, employers need to hire people who have the hard skills – reading, writing and math – and the soft skills – the ability to be communicators, collaborators and critical thinkers. Research confirms the most important factor in developing these skills is quality early learning programs. Children who participate in these programs will increase pre-math skills by 21 percent, increase pre-reading skills by 52 percent; cut special education placements by 43 percent; increase graduation rates by 44 percent and increase median earnings by 36 percent.

Currently, ESEA Title I grants permit use of funds for early education. Still, there is no dedicated stream of funding to help states expand access to high-quality early education programs. **We strongly urge you to provide in ESEA reauthorization new dedicated Title I funding to help states expand access to high-quality early education programs, including pre-kindergarten.**

Critical to businesses getting the skilled, educated workforce needed for the 21st century is increasing graduation rates from our high schools. In America today, 31 percent of high school students do not graduate on time. Lack of skilled workers costs American businesses and communities \$319 billion in lost wages, taxes and productivity every year. In fact, businesses spend over \$3.7 billion every year to teach their employees basic skills in reading, writing, math and English. **We strongly urge you to require in ESEA reauthorization enhanced data collection on high school graduation rates, and to hold schools accountable for graduating students.**

On behalf of business leaders from across the country who understand that early education is critical to sustaining America's competitive edge and ensuring sustained economic security, we appreciate your leadership in these areas, and look forward to working with you and your committee to advance proven investments in kids and reforms in our nation's education laws that will not only improve educational outcomes, but also strengthen businesses, the economy and communities.

Sincerely,



Susan L. Gates
National Director