

May 5, 2011

The Honorable Patty Murray
448 Russell Senate Office Building
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Murray:

The more than 450 business leaders of AMERICA'S EDGE, including over 50 in Washington State, work to strengthen businesses and the economy through proven investments in children and youth. We 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, which make both short- and long-term fiscal sense. **As Congress prepares to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), we urge you to consider several important reforms and investments that will ensure businesses have a workforce with the 21st-century knowledge, skills, and abilities we need. First among these is an increasing focus on early learning.**

High-quality early care and education programs for all children are critical to sustaining and strengthening businesses, the economy and communities. Research shows that for every dollar invested in early learning in the U.S., roughly \$2 is generated in additional spending in state and local economies. 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 that children who participate in high-quality early learning 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. This is why we **strongly urge you to encourage states to shift away from the traditional K-12 approach towards a system that incorporates early learning into the educational structure so kids are ready to learn when they enter kindergarten.**

In addition to early learning, we believe we must provide incentives for States to: reduce dropouts and foster greater graduation rates; ensure accountability through data collection; implement targeted, evidence-based approaches that improve academic achievement; strengthen the proven Career Academies model; and examine the use of evidence-based summer learning approaches.

As business leaders who understand that key investments in our younger generations are critical to sustaining America's competitive edge and ensuring sustained economic security, we appreciate your leadership in these areas. We know you are a champion for our nation's youngest learners and look forward to working with you and your committee to advance these priorities as sound policy, both in the short- and long-term, to strengthen businesses, the economy and communities.

Sincerely,

Bob Watt
Civic Volunteer
The Boeing Company (Ret.)

Mike Edwards
Director
Thurston First Bank

Kevin Washington
Chair – Education Committee
Tabor 100

Patrick J. Beehler
Senior Surveyor
David Evans & Associates

Carl Bruner
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Mount Vernon School District No. 320

Laura Cailloux
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