



October 29, 2008

The Hon. Charles Schumer
The Hon. Carolyn Maloney
Co-Chairs, Joint Economic Committee
Washington D.C. 20515

Dear Senator Schumer and Congresswoman Maloney:

Without question, the economic crisis demands of us wiser choices about our national priorities and sounder investments in the future. With the same urgency that marks your current deliberations, we in the early education community submit the following: public investment in pre-kindergarten is an integral component of America's economic recovery and must be a part of any strategy moving forward.

While few policies offer a guaranteed return, investments in early childhood yield dividends our nation cannot afford to pass up. When we ensure our nation's youngest children thrive, it benefits them, their families, our communities, and our nation. Decades of research on high-quality pre-k have demonstrate that a federal investment in early education now, not when we're in the black, would yield the following short and long term benefits:

- More three and four year old children – undergoing the most critical stage of brain development of their lives – can attend programs that prepare them for school and for life;
- Family pocketbooks receive much-needed relief.
- States see a reduction in costly special education, remediation, criminal justice, and social services expenses.
- Our future workforce gains the foundational skills they will need to compete in the 21st century global economy.

While we know parents are always the first and most important teachers, today's parents are stretched thin in many ways. For far too many, the current choice is an anguishing one between the pre-k program they wish they could afford – sometimes costing as much as a semester of college – and the one (often of dubious quality) they settle for. This problem is especially acute for the middle class.

Ensuring that children enter school ready to learn and succeed is fundamentally sound fiscal policy. Human capital is as important as any other form of capital we invest in as a society. To assure a strong economy, it is imperative to increase support for proven human capital strategies as much *because of* our current financial crisis as despite it.

Recently, the Partnership for America's Economic Success—a coalition created by a group of business leaders, economists, advocates, and a dozen funders in order to document the economic impacts of investments in children from before birth to age five—brought together 150 business and civic leaders in Telluride, Colorado, for the second annual Economic Summit on Early Childhood

Investment. This broad and diverse audience concluded that “investing in children is a vital economic growth strategy.”

As you and your colleagues devise a plan to address both Main Street and our nation’s flagging competitiveness in the global marketplace, we recommend two guiding principles: (1) invest where the proven returns are greatest; and (2) check results to make sure we get what we pay for. The decisions you are about to make will affect the country for years to come. If your decisions are based on these principles, we will stimulate stronger growth, create more jobs, and recover faster.

Before you decide what constitutes pro-economic growth spending and what doesn’t, please consider the legacy of your decisions. Imagine the next generation, attempting to manage an unfathomable national debt yet unable to manage their own checkbooks, get along with colleagues, write a business proposal, or see a project through; a significant number will be high-school dropouts and a potential drain on society. Why? Because when they were three and four years old, their national leaders—in an attempt to exercise fiscal responsibility—failed to invest in the very programs that foster early numeracy, literacy, tenacity, and teamwork: foundations for learning and adult success.

Finally, know that there is broad support for making early education a priority. In a national survey conducted for Pre-K Now earlier this year, the majority of voters agreed that if the U.S. makes investments in early learning, the country will become more competitive in the global economy. These voters reflect the growing recognition among business leaders, policymakers, economists, child development experts, and families that building human capital through quality early education is an appropriate role for government to play. Today, given the historic crossroads at which we stand, it is not just appropriate; it is urgent.

Thank you for your leadership. We are happy to serve as a resource at any time and stand ready to do so.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Libby Doggett". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Libby Doggett, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Pre-K Now

cc: U.S. House of Representatives
U.S. Senate