



April 27, 2010

The Honorable Patty Murray  
173 Russell Senate Office Building  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Murray:

The Early Learning Action Alliance is a broad coalition of more than 45 organizations representing a diverse array of Washington nonprofits, professional associations, businesses and industries. We appreciate your leadership on behalf of children in Washington and encourage you to continue to be a leading voice for early learning on the national level.

The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act provides a unique opportunity to transform American education into a system that lays firm foundations during these early years and builds upon those foundations with high quality learning opportunities each year thereafter. ELAA believes that improving the early years of the education continuum—beginning at birth and continuing through third grade—is essential to ensuring that every child is college- and career-ready.

Federal policies that reflect the significance of early learning on children's emotional, social, and academic achievement are imperative to maximize Washington State's investments in early learning. For this reason, we urge you to update the ESEA to reflect the indisputable evidence that the early years of children's education—those from pre-kindergarten through third grade—establish essential skills and behaviors that support college- and career-readiness.

Like many of our national partners, we believe in the importance of five areas of federal education policy that could better support children and best prepare them for college, careers, and meaningful adult lives: funding; teacher and principal quality and development; data collection; accountability and assessment; and expanded learning time. We recommend that these areas, outlined below, should be included as changes for ESEA's reauthorization<sup>1</sup>:

### **Funding**

- Enable and provide incentives for Title I dollars to flow more freely to early childhood and pre-kindergarten through third grade programs.
- Ensure that Title I funding set-asides do not supplant pre-kindergarten funding where it already exists.
- Encourage districts to embed high-quality pre-kindergarten through third grade strategies as one of their priorities for turning around low-performing schools.
- Reward States for creating high-quality early learning programs and aligned pre-kindergarten through third grade systems.
- Change the funding formulae within ESEA so that they are based on communities of children age 3 to 17 instead of 5 to 17.

### **Teacher and Principal Quality and Development**

- Explicitly include early childhood teachers in professional development programs.
- Emphasize the need for more teacher training and professional development based on the most current research in child development and the needs of young English language learners and other special populations.
- Strengthen professional development for elementary school principals to assist them in designing and implementing comprehensive, aligned systems that include early childhood program and extend through third grade.



### **Longitudinal Data Collection**

- Ensure that the collection of federal longitudinal data in kindergarten through twelfth grade is more fully integrated with data collection in programs that serve children before kindergarten entry.
- Require districts to report how Title I funds are used for children under five-years-old.

### **Accountability and Assessment**

- Ensure that schools and districts are rewarded for creating and sustaining high-quality classroom experiences throughout the preschool years and early grades.
- Spur the development of valid and reliable measurement tools that are appropriate for young children and the classrooms in which they learn.

### **Extended Learning Time**

- Recognize high-quality early childhood programs as an eligible use of funds designed to extend learning time.

From the work of the Washington Learns Steering Committee in 2005, co-chaired by Governor Gregoire to the continuing work to develop a statewide early learning plan, Washington State has been unwavering in the vision of a high quality education system beginning with high quality early learning. Research shows that high-quality classroom experiences throughout this period of a child's life can lead to significant gains in achievement. Research also shows that a child who is still struggling to read by the third grade may never catch up. Washington State understands the importance of providing young children with high quality learning experiences and, as a result, has made significant strides to protect and build upon current investments in early learning.

Given what we know about the individual, economic, and societal benefits of high-quality early learning, our government has an obligation to ensure that all children have the opportunity to experience high-quality pre-kindergarten, full-day kindergarten, and grades kindergarten through three. This will take the work of, and collaborative partnerships between, school districts, state educational agencies and the federal government. ESEA provides the opportunity to establish both a vision and a plan for an American education system that starts early and maintains rigorous attention to the quality of each subsequent grade-level. We hope that this letter compels you to infuse pre-kindergarten through third grade strategies throughout the law. An approach that does so would equal true education reform.

Thank you for your constant commitment and leadership for kids in Washington.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jon Gould".

Jon Gould  
Early Learning Action Alliance  
718 Sixth Avenue South  
Seattle, WA 98104

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<sup>i</sup> For further detail of these recommendations, please refer to a letter signed by 13 organizations focused on improving outcomes for children, sent on March 26, 2010. The letter provides expanded detail for each specific recommendation outlined above: ([http://education.newamerica.net/sites/newamerica.net/files/profiles/attachments/Pre-K-3rd%20Grade\\_Consensus\\_recommendations\\_on\\_ESEA\\_032610.pdf](http://education.newamerica.net/sites/newamerica.net/files/profiles/attachments/Pre-K-3rd%20Grade_Consensus_recommendations_on_ESEA_032610.pdf))