ReadyNation Washington

Strengthening business through
effective investments in children and youth

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WASHINGTON BUSINESS LEADERS URGE INVESTMENT IN PRE-K

Smart Investments in High-Quality Pre-Kindergarten Will Create a Better, More Productive Workforce and Deliver Short- and Long-Term Economic Gains

SEATTLE, WA – Expanding access to quality pre-kindergarten in Washington could save millions of dollars in the long run, boost the economy in the short run, and help the state create better students and workers in the future. Those are the key takeaways in a new ReadyNation report, "The Pre-K to Workforce Pipeline," released today, and available in full **here**.

The report explains that too many of our kids are not proficient in math and reading or graduating from high school at the rates necessary to go on to be successful in the workforce.

The problem is significant. Approximately 2,000 kindergarteners were held back in 2013, at an average cost of about $5,700 per student—a total cost of over $11 million to our state. Less than 40 percent of our eighth graders are proficient in math and reading. Twenty-two percent of Washington high school students fail to graduate within four years.

Investments in high-quality pre-K are a solution. Research shows that high-quality pre-K programs help prepare children for success in school and life by building a solid foundation for both core skills, like early math, reading, and writing, and "executive-functioning" skills, like impulse-control, problem-solving, and working well in groups. Learning these skills early on can help lead to achievement later. For example, one study showed that children who are reading on grade level by third grade were four times more likely to graduate from high school.

"The idea we need to understand is that developmentally-appropriate pre-K education that promotes all aspects of children's development—academic, social, emotional and physical—is not only the right thing to do for kids, but also an effective **workforce development strategy**," said **Peter Raulerson**, a Bellevue business executive and entrepreneur in the technology sector. "The high-tech sector needs people who can navigate complex technical and interpersonal terrain. The abilities to work well with people and problem solve starts from a very early age—I see this clearly when I look at my grandkids."

The Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP, called "E-cap"), is Washington's pre-K program. It is a comprehensive, family-focused pre-K program for at-risk three- and four-year-olds. ECEAP was established in 1985 by governor-requested legislation and has measurable, lasting impacts on children's math and reading abilities. Children who attended the program have higher math and reading test scores in third, fourth, and fifth grades, compared to similar non-attendees.

ECEAP serves our most at-risk children. In the 2015-2016 school year, ECEAP serves approximately 11,600 children statewide, 92 percent of whom live at or below 110% of the federal poverty line ($21,483 for a family of three), including two-thirds with a family income less than 80% FPL. Some of the children also have an Individualized Education Plan for addressing a disability, are homeless, speak English as a second language, or have parents with less than a high school education.

The need is high. "Too many of our kids—especially those who are most vulnerable—are not getting a strong start on a path towards success and prosperity in life, school, and work. Studies show that kids make big gains in ECEAP in the areas of literacy and math. I see firsthand how hard it is on kids when they enter kindergarten unprepared. Investments in high-quality pre-K like ECEAP appeal to me as a business leader, taxpayer, and community member because remediation, grade retention, and poor workforce preparedness is hard on kids, families, schools, and taxpayers," says **Rick Donahoe**, CEO of the Children's Reading Foundation in Kennewick, WA, Richland School Board member, and retired engineer and business executive.

ReadyNation members support a $10 million investment in ECEAP. Members of ReadyNation in Washington are sharing this report with lawmakers in Olympia this session and urging them to invest an additional $10 million in ECEAP in the 2016 Supplemental budget to improve the access to and quality of this important program. ReadyNation member **Mike Edwards**, retired Supervisor of Banking for the State of Washington, noted that "This $10 million investment is a modest but important step in supporting the brightest future possible for our kids, preparing our future workforce, and developing a prosperous economy."

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