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May 30, 2013

The Honorable Keith Faber
President of the Ohio Senate
The State House, Columbus, OH 43215

Dear President Faber:

On behalf of the Ohio Business Roundtable Executive Committee and our extended membership, thank you for taking the time to meet with us earlier this week.

The connection between early learning and economic development is tight. With all you and other policymakers are doing to grow Ohio's economy, we ask that you invest even more in high-quality pre-k for disadvantaged children.

And so we are encouraged that your colleagues in the Senate are discussing a \$50 million proposal that will provide an additional 11,000 at-risk children access to high-quality pre-k to prepare them to succeed in kindergarten and beyond.

As business people, we focus a good deal on return on investment. The ROI for early learning is higher than at any stage of the k-16 pipeline. Quality early learning increases third grade reading proficiency, prevents achievement gaps, reduces the need for special education and lowers crime rates and social costs. Early learning strengthens regional economies, employee productivity and per capita income.

The business case is well documented by University of Chicago Nobel Laureate economist Dr. James Heckman together with voluminous research reports by both the Upjohn Institute and Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis. The brain research, alone, conducted at the Harvard Center for the Developing Child are enough spur us to action.


Given this body of compelling research, three years ago, the BRT adopted early learning as a top priority and launched a business-led effort to ensure that, by 2020, 90% of Ohio's children would enter kindergarten ready to succeed.

We're making progress. It starts at the top with the Governor's newly appointed early learning officer, development of a state-of-the art kindergarten readiness assessment to be piloted this fall, and the important systems accountability improvements being led by the Administration from Ohio's award-winning Race to the Top grant. We are smarter than we have ever been about what works to achieve the high ROIs asserted by the research.

Yet with all this progress, we continue to underinvest. In 2010, the State cut \$200 million from early learning which, among other things, eliminated high-quality pre-k for 12,000 poor kids and their families. We have yet to make up this lost ground. So, in a real sense, the \$50 million being discussed by Senate members is not new money, but needed "catch up" money to be allocated exclusively to serve disadvantaged children in programs that work.

We urge the Senate's strong consideration of that proposal and stand ready to work with you to ensure those funds achieve their intended results.

Sincerely,


Albert P.L. Stroucken
Chairman and CEO, Owens-Illinois
Co-Chair, BRT Early Learning Task Force


Richard A. Stoff
President and CEO
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