

Testimony
2013 Joint Legislative Hearing
Elementary and Secondary Education Committee
F. Michael Tucker, President, Center for Economic Growth
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Thank you, Members of the Committee, for giving me the opportunity to testify today.

I am Mike Tucker, President of the Center for Economic Growth. I am also a member of America's Edge, a group of more than 100 business leaders across New York State. America's Edge members work to strengthen businesses and the economy through proven investments in children.

As a member, I am here today to talk to you about investing early and along the education continuum. The Governor has proposed making additional investments in public education this year, for which we applaud him. I urge you to support his recommendations and to do two things to strengthen educational quality:

- Reinforce the investment of \$25 million for full-day Pre-K and include a commitment to quality with a \$2 million set-aside from that funding.
- Support education models that help students develop the skills needed in the private sector – communication, collaboration, and critical thinking – while also increasing student engagement, graduation rates, and enrollment in post-secondary training and education.

Let's start with some facts here in New York:

- 74% of our students graduate high school on time;
- 35% of our high school graduates are considered college- and career-ready;
- 70% of our eighth graders are below grade level in math; and
- 65% of our fourth graders read below grade level.

Nationwide, 60% of children aged three to five start Kindergarten without even basic skills —such as recognizing letters, numbers, and shapes. How can this be?

Unfortunately, the answer is one of investments in what research confirms a quality early learning program needs.

Let's talk about Pre-K.

I applaud the Governor on his new \$25 million investment in Pre-K. This is a big step forward that builds on the initial investment in Pre-K that the Legislature made years ago. Why do I care as a business leader? According to an America's Edge report, every \$1 invested in early learning generates a total of \$1.86 in sales of local goods and services across New York. This strong economic boost for local businesses is as high or higher than investments in other major sectors such as construction (\$1.86), retail trade (\$1.83), manufacturing (\$1.72), transportation (\$1.72) and utilities (\$1.53).

Governor Cuomo's proposal will increase access to full-day programs for our highest needs children. Research shows that full-day Pre-K is more educationally effective than part-day, preparing children to succeed in school and to be reading on grade level by third grade.

As both the Governor's Education Reform Commission and his Executive Budget stressed, this new investment must go to Pre-K programs—in both public schools and community settings—that focus on quality, with a commitment to qualified teachers, effective teaching, and a quality learning environment.

Research shows that high-quality, intensive programs yield greater school success, decreased need for special education services, while also increasing graduation rates and enrollment in post-secondary training and education. On the other hand, Pre-K (and other early care and education) programs of low-quality are not harmless; research shows that they are actually detrimental to children. Low-

quality programs can have harmful effects on language, social development, and school performance.

America's Edge members believe in quality. As business leaders, we only invest in high-quality products with measurable results and a return on investment. That is why we urge **New York State to set-aside \$2 million from the \$25 million investment in full-day Pre-K to specifically fund quality.**

Now let's look at what happens when we don't invest early.

According to the Nation's Report Card, only 26% of our 12th grade students are proficient in math and 38 percent are proficient in reading. Only 37% of New York public school students graduate "college and career ready." Three-quarters of New York City public high school graduates enrolling for associate's degrees at the CUNY require remedial courses. The lack of a skilled workforce comes at a high cost for individuals, businesses and our economy. In New York in 2010, 11% of high school dropouts were jobless, versus 6% of college graduates.

At the same time, education requirements for new jobs are increasing. Seven in 10 new jobs created in New York between 2008 and 2018 will require some type of formal education beyond high school. Fourteen of the 25 fastest growing occupations in our state will require post-secondary education.

Too many of our graduates are unprepared for success in school and in life. We must close this skills gap to ensure that students not only graduate—but that they do so college and career ready. But how do we do that?

We applaud the Governor for his \$20 million investment in extended learning, with a focus on academically enriched programming. We are pleased that the Education Reform Commission cited investing in Career Academies, Early College High School programs, and Career and Technical Education programs in its recommendations. Businesses know that career relevance must be incorporated into the classroom.

School is sometimes boring. Too many students do not understand why they need to know what they are being taught, lose interest in school, and then do not develop the skills employers expect of them. America's Edge recommends a concentration on innovative models in our high schools that can help students stay engaged and graduate with a real understanding of what they will need to succeed in college and on the job, thus better ensuring New York business leaders will have a workforce armed with the necessary skills to survive in a global marketplace.

We believe that New York State should develop standards for college and career readiness that contain both rigorous academic content and the teaching of advanced skills such as critical thinking, communication, and the application of content knowledge. For example, some successful models have curriculum that follows a project-based learning environment that emphasizes math, science and technology, but also exposes students to language, arts and physical education. Students are also given work-based learning opportunities. By working in teams and getting real work experience, students begin to understand the importance of professionalism, reliability, teamwork and clear communications skills.

We hope that the money invested in extended learning will take these components of innovative programs into account.

We think that the Governor's proposed investment in early learning is absolutely critical, and that it dovetails with important initiatives to improve our education and workforce pipeline—including SUNY Chancellor Nancy Zimpher's "Cradle to Career Alliance."

New York State's businesses are getting back on track. But for this trend to continue—and improve—New York must invest in programs with measurable outcomes. America's Edge supports an increased investment along the education continuum—from early childhood through high school graduation—and urges you to strengthen that investment by making a commitment to high-quality, innovative programs. Thank you for your time and consideration.

