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March 2, 2016

The Honorable Richard Hanna  
U.S. House of Representatives  
319 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515-3222

The Honorable Robert C. Scott  
U.S. House of Representatives  
1201 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515-4603

Dear Reps. Hanna and Scott:

On behalf of the three million members of the National Education Association and the students they serve, we are pleased to support the Strong Start for America's Children Act of 2015 (H.R. 2411), which promotes high-quality early learning opportunities for children from birth until age five. This vitally important legislation complements the recently enacted Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which addresses early childhood education and takes significant steps to broaden access to it, especially among disadvantaged students.

H.R. 2411 would establish a new federal-state partnership to accelerate progress already underway and help states fund high-quality prekindergarten for 4-year olds from low-income families (up to 200 percent of the federal poverty level, which is currently \$24,250 for a family of four); encourage states to support prekindergarten for 4-year-olds from moderate-income families; and encourage learning opportunities for even younger children—for example, through partnerships with Early Head Start programs.

The first years of a child's life—when the brain is still forming—are a vital window of opportunity. [Research](#) shows that children who attend high-quality prekindergarten programs are less likely to drop out of school, repeat grades, need special education, or get in trouble with the law later on. Such programs play a critical role in putting a child on the path to success—in school and in life—so every child should have access to them, not just children whose parents can afford to pay.

High-quality prekindergarten programs also bring enormous economic benefits. They can pay for themselves in as little as one year and, over decades, save the states and the federal government billions of dollars. Investments in high-quality preschool can carry eventual benefit-to-cost ratios as high as 8-to-1, according to the Economic Policy Institute.

NEA's members strongly believe that prekindergarten should be provided primarily by public entities whenever possible. Criteria should be designed to ensure program quality, include the non-discrimination and non-proselytizing requirements in federal laws such as Head Start and the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), and preserve the principle of church and state separation when it comes to how federal funding is used.

Investing in our youngest children is investing in our nation's future. We thank you for introducing this groundbreaking legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Mary Kusler", enclosed in a thin black rectangular border.

Mary Kusler  
Director, Government Relations