

September 15, 2011

The Honorable Edmund G. Brown, Jr.  
Governor of the State of California  
State Capitol Building  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Governor Brown:

On behalf of AMERICA'S EDGE, a nonprofit organization including more than 50 business leaders in California committed to strengthening American businesses and our state's economy through proven investments in children and youth, **we write in support of Assembly Bill 790** (Furutani). This bill establishes a Linked Learning high school pilot program in California school districts through competitive grants approved by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Linked Learning is a multi-year education approach that integrates rigorous academics, relevant career-technical education, support services for students and real-world work-based learning experiences supported by industry and community partners. Linked Learning students *opt-in* to industry themed pathways in a wide range of fields, and these pathways prepare students for future careers as well as a full range of postsecondary options, including two- and four-year college, apprenticeships, the military or formal employment training.

Career-themed education is critical to our economy because California businesses are not getting workers with the right skills. According to a May 2011 AMERICA'S EDGE report titled "Can California Compete? Reducing the Skills Gap and Building a Skilled Workforce through Linked Learning," nearly half (47 percent) of California jobs are in "middle skills" careers – requiring education beyond a high school diploma but less than a 4-year college degree. However, only 38 percent of California workers have the skills to fill these positions, creating a nearly 10-percentage-point skills gap. California's economic health looks even more dire when this middle-skill "gap" is coupled with the shortage of workers expected for careers requiring science, technology, engineering and math skills.

The Linked Learning approach has been identified as one of the most promising strategies for high school transformation. National studies on Career Academies, upon which Linked Learning is based, indicate that students who participate in such programs go on to work 12 percent more hours per week and earn 11 percent more money than non-participating students.

Not only is Linked Learning good for students, it is good for California businesses. Increased productivity for businesses and higher incomes for employees leads to greater spending power for individuals and more revenue for California. Fewer dropouts also means less of a financial burden to the state and taxpayers. More importantly, such programs also provide students with critical work-readiness skills they will need to succeed in an increasingly competitive job market.

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The pilot program established by AB 790 would build off of that success and resolve issues that make it challenging for Linked Learning to thrive as an effective method of school improvement. For these reasons, we support AB 790.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jennifer Ortega". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jennifer Ortega  
California State Director  
AMERICA'S EDGE