



November 15, 2005

Dear Members of Congress:

Congress has shown important leadership in building a national, bipartisan consensus around the need for this nation to dramatically improve educational outcomes of students from low-income families. Cutting support for anti-hunger programs and student financial aid for college runs contrary to this national commitment.

I am writing today to urge you not to cut funding for food stamps, reduce eligibility for the free-lunch program that supports our most vulnerable students, or make financial aid for students from low-income families more expensive. These actions would sacrifice the educational prospects of striving students, and the economic prospects of the nation.

The United States cannot afford to cut its commitment to poor children. More than half of our fourth-grade students from low-income families cannot read even at the basic level; at the eighth grade, half are below basic in mathematics. International comparisons show that low-income 15-year-olds in America don't just perform below their middle class counterparts in this country—they perform worse even than low-income students in other developed countries.

Students from poor families are the greatest untapped resource in this country. They want that American Dream, but we're making it harder and harder for them to achieve it. While 60 percent of students from high-income families have a college degree by the time they are 26, *only 7 percent of young people from low-income families have a college degree by the same age.* These gaps are growing ever wider, with alarming consequences – both for these young people and for our country. In a recent survey by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the United States was the only country where older adults were more likely to have a college degree than younger adults.

These statistics are repugnant to a nation dedicated to equality of opportunity and to the notion that each generation can have a better life than the one before it. But they also represent a loss of human capital that simply is untenable in the rapidly evolving knowledge economy.

My organization, the Education Trust, works every day to help schools and colleges change their educational practices to better meet the needs of low-income young people. I am concerned that Congress does not appear even to be willing to keep pace with inflation in funding for education, including Title I funds that help serve poor children. But the proposed cuts are more troubling still: Each of us knows that children who are hungry cannot learn to their potential and that students overburdened by the costs of college are likely to leave before completing.

The proposal to cut food stamps, free lunch eligibility, and support for student loans undermines this nation's ability to educate young people from low-income families at a time when their educational attainment will determine not just their future, but America's as well.

I urge you to vote *for* America's future and *against* these cuts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read "K. Haycock", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Kati Haycock
Director
The Education Trust