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An Independent Nonprofit Aerospace Organization

Michael M. Dunn
President/CEO

March 5, 2009

The Honorable Robert M. Gates
Pentagon, Room 3E880
Washington, D.C. 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Gates:

The Air Force Association (AFA), a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization representing approximately 125,000 current and former Airmen and their families, is writing to express our support for the *DoD STARBASE* program. *STARBASE* is one of the primary tools DoD has in its inventory to contribute to the ongoing, renewed national effort intended to close the serious achievement gap with competing nations, and to perpetuate our long-term security and prosperity.

In accordance with the vision of *DoD STARBASE*, AFA believes that there is an urgent need to establish unparalleled student achievement in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) curricula at every level of their education. From the elementary-age student to the young scholars in our nation's high school AP classes and beyond, we must work to make STEM careers a rewarding and attractive option to ensure the best talent and return on investment.

We are confident that President Obama recognizes this priority. As he said on September 9, 2008 in Dayton, Ohio: "It's not just that a world-class education is essential for workers to compete and win, it's that an educated workforce is essential for America to compete and win. Without a workforce trained in math, science and technology, and the other skills of the 21st century, our companies will innovate less, our economy will grow less, and our nation will be less competitive. If we want to outcompete the world tomorrow, we must out-educate the world today." This and many other statements leave us with little doubt that the President understands the strategic importance of enhancing our ability and our excellence in education.


The importance of *STARBASE*... the reason it is so successful... is because it is focused on fifth graders – children who are at a critical age for cementing their interests and aspirations. We must challenge, excite, and inspire these children who will become the engineers and designers that will sustain our information-age economy and security apparatus, as it is clear both will be extremely dependant upon our ability to innovate and create entirely new technologies. Clearly, this is an important ***national security issue***.

Over the years AFA has sustained a considerable financial commitment to the education of our youth, from both the enlisted and officer ranks, who are seeking to advance their educational attainment, to dependents, and to teachers.

We believe in *DoD STARBASE* because we have seen the exciting and unique work this valuable program is performing across the nation. We hope that you will use your authority to enhance and sustain this program.

Thank you for your consideration. We can be reached at (703) 247-5801.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael M. Dunn". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each word being capitalized and prominent.

Michael M. Dunn
President and CEO