completing high school as early as sixth grade. With early intervention, quality teachers, small classes, and data-driven instruction, we can ensure that these students make progress, stay in school and succeed.

Once students reach high school, we must do more to engage them in the learning process. States and cities across the country are already taking steps to address this challenge, such as offering extra help during the school day, extending learning time, and adopting other school-based interventions.

In Massachusetts, Boston public schools are working with private partners to create smaller learning communities, improve instruction, and strengthen professional development for teachers. Our high schools are undergoing a transformation to focus on business, technology, health professions, arts, public service, engineering, sciences, international studies, and social policy of them, students can prepare for future opportunities after they graduate, by enrolling in courses for college credit or pursuing hands-on experience in a career that interests them.

We must do all we can in Congress to help our districts like Boston mount significant efforts to address these issues and make progress in reducing the dropout rate.

I have joined my colleagues on the HELP Committee—Senator BINGAMAN and Senator BURR—in introducing the Graduation Promise Act, which would fund state efforts that target resources and reforms to turn around high schools with low graduation rates. Twenty-five percent of America’s high schools produce half of our dropouts. In these schools—some of which have as many as 400 students in a freshman class—only 10 percent of the students start high school already having repeated a grade, or are special education students, or are two years or more below grade level.

It’s very clear that these schools need more assistance in supporting and retaining these students, and that’s what we hope to provide.

We must also do more to better connect schools with the communities around them, and provide the safety-net of services that at-risk students need to help them stay in school. The Keeping PACE Act would provide federal assistance to these efforts.

Supporting the social, emotional, intellectual, and physical development of our youth is a key strategy for breaking down the barriers to learning.

Finally, in order to target reforms, we must accurately measure and track graduation rates throughout the country. Today, in some districts, students who leave school are counted as dropouts only if they have registered as dropouts. In other districts, a promise to graduate, but failing a GED test, all it takes to be counted as a “graduate.” That’s unacceptable. Obtaining reliable data is the only way to identify and target the level of reform and resources necessary to assist schools struggling with high dropout rates.

We have an obligation to encourage these and other creative reforms in our schools, and provide the support structure and safe harbor needed to prevent students at-risk from dropping out. But we must also back up these essential reforms with real investments.

Today, the federal investment in education at all levels—especially in the middle and high school grades—is not sufficient. Only 8 percent of students who benefit from the federal investment in Title I are in high school. Ninety-percent of high schools with very low graduation rates have high concentrations of low-income students—but only a quarter of them receive federal assistance. We need to dedicate more resources and support for secondary schools to improve academic achievement and ensure that every student has a fair opportunity to graduate. We need to target our efforts, resources, and ideas for effective reform to the schools that need them most.

As we consider ways to strengthen and advance our national commitment to leave no child behind, we have an opportunity to give teachers, schools, districts and states the support they need to ensure a high-quality education for every student.

We can no longer turn a blind eye to the millions of young people who fall through the cracks. Let us demand more of ourselves. Let us recommit ourselves to the spirit and the principles of excellence and equal opportunity that have shaped our historic commitment to improving public education. Above all, let us commit ourselves to the great goal of making this nation what we hope to provide.

I would like to extend my sincerest thanks and appreciation to Kate for all of the fine work she has done and wish her continued success in the years to come.

TRIBUTE TO KATE MARTIN

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, today I rise to recognize Kate Martin, an intern in my Washington, DC, office, for all of the hard work she has done for me, my staff, and the State of South Dakota over the past several months.

Kate is a graduate of Ellendale High School in Ellendale, ND. Currently she is attending the University of North Dakota, where she is majoring in marketing and is pursuing a minor in international business. She is also active in her sorority Kappa Alpha Theta. She is a hard worker who has been dedicated to getting the most out of her internship experience.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks and appreciation to Kate for all of the fine work she has done and wish her continued success in the years to come.

COMMENDING PAT SEAMANS WALKER

Mr. PRYOR. Mr. President, it is with great pleasure that I commend an outstanding Arkansan on her birthday for her truly amazing gifts to the State of Arkansas. Mrs. Pat Seamans Walker, a Springdale resident, has always been a leader in Arkansas philanthropy by providing donations for many worthwhile causes, especially healthcare, education and human service organizations.

Mrs. Walker and her late husband Will founded the Willard and Pat Walker Charitable Foundation in 1986. Since that time, their generosity has touched the lives of thousands of Arkansans. Mrs. Walker is a member of the Foundation Board for the Arkansas Cancer Research Center, and an active member of First Christian Church of Springdale. She also participates in the oversight of the Walker Charitable Foundation.