



ON THE SCENE



Seattle Times reporter John Higgins; Anne Arnold of Highline School District; Tulsa County Commissioner Ron Peters; Rep. Ruth Kagi; Seattle Mayor Ed Murray; Dr. Patricia Kuhl and Dr. Andrew Meltzoff, co-directors of I-LABS at the University of Washington.

LiveWire event series launches with early learning

More than 400 people attended The Seattle Times' inaugural LiveWire event, "The Case for Early Learning," on Oct. 15 at Microsoft's Redmond campus for a discussion about early childhood learning and universal preschool. The LiveWire event series, presented by Microsoft in partnership with The Seattle Times, features vital issues impacting our region and its people. Each event will bring together local and national experts for a conversation moderated by a Seattle Times reporter. Series event sponsors include the University of Washington and the Sabey Corporation.

The panel on Oct. 15 included brain scientists (and husband and wife) Patricia Kuhl and Andrew Meltzoff, co-directors of the University of Washington Institute for Learning and Brain Sciences (I-LABS); Tulsa County Commissioner Ron Peters, a former Oklahoma state legislator who helped pass a universal public preschool bill; Rep. Ruth Kagi, D-Seattle, chair of the House Early Learning and Human Services Committee; Seattle Mayor Ed Murray, who supports phasing in universal preschool in Seattle; and Anne Arnold, P-3 director at Highline School District. John Higgins, Seattle Times K-12 reporter, moderated the discussion.



"Bilingual learning is good for the brain," said Dr. Kuhl.

At a reception prior to the event, Peters marveled at the turnout, saying that when he first introduced the idea of universal preschool in 2000 in his state, only a handful of people showed up. "I think more people are being persuaded by the research," he said. Alayne Sulkin, founder of ParentMap magazine, said she expected that the audience would be "wowed" by what brain scientists Kuhl and Meltzoff planned to present that night. (ParentMap was the event's media sponsor.)

Chris Korsmo, CEO of the Seattle-based League of Education Voters, was already wowed. "I-LABS is the foremost institution in showing us evidence around brain research, so having them here and having them in our own backyard is such a blessing."

Jim Gaudino, president of Central Washington University, agreed. "Early learning is possibly the most important topic we could be talking about ... If we don't reach down into these young brains, it's going to be very hard to get them

prepared to go to Central Washington University, or the University of Washington."

The audience of community members, educators and policymakers appeared largely sympathetic to universal preschool, but Murray pointed

out that "there is not universal agreement about the path," or how it should be paid for. Murray was

referring to the competing preschool measures before Seattle voters in November.

Brad Smith, Microsoft general counsel and executive vice president, opened the evening with some brief remarks and then, the stage belonged to the brain scientists. Kuhl spoke first, sharing findings from I-LABS' decades of research. "Babies are geniuses," she told the audience, but by age 5, the brain has reached 92 percent of its maximum size, with the peak of synaptic development happening

around 3. This early period, she said, is critical for language development.

Babies are born learning, said Meltzoff, and they learn by imitating others. Children in early learning environments — like daycare and

preschool — are paying attention to their teachers and peers, and their "brain is getting tuned."

While the panel agreed that early learning was important, moderator Higgins pointed out that Washington state has many competing priorities regarding education. "I don't think anyone could listen to Dr. Kuhl and Dr. Meltzoff and not realize the importance of those first five years," said Rep. Kagi.

The panel took audience questions before University of Washington president Michael Young gave the closing remarks, saying: "We cannot

waste our most important natural resource, these young people."

Kuhl confirmed, after the event, that she had missed a White House meeting to attend the LiveWire symposium. "We're strongly

invested in the city and the state, and think it can be a model for the nation," she said.

"If you believe that, you want to do it here. I want to be where it's happening."

The next LiveWire event, "A Bridge to China: Exploring the Northwest's Future with the East," will be on Nov. 20. The panel

includes former U.S. Ambassador to China Gary Locke and Ray Conner, president and CEO of Boeing Commercial Airplanes, among other China experts.



Michael Young, president of the University of Washington, gave the closing remarks.



Audience members lined up to ask questions of the panel.

SEE AND BE SCENE

The inaugural LiveWire event kicked off with a VIP reception at the Microsoft Conference Center.



I-LABS colleagues Kimberly Madden, left, and Sandy Schumann.



Seattle Times Deputy Managing Editor Jim Simon and Rep. Ruth Kagi.



Suzanne Haggard of Haggard Nelson Childcare Resources, retired educator Sandy Anderson, and Joanne Hufnagel of Bellevue.



Microsoft General Counsel Brad Smith and Seattle Mayor Ed Murray.



Lynne Varner, associate vice president of public affairs at Washington State University and Mary Gresch, chief marketing officer of the University of Washington.



Alayne Sulkin, founder of ParentMap; Mayor Murray and Seattle Times Publisher Frank Blethen.



Katherine Long, Seattle Times higher education reporter; Christopher Eide of Teachers United; Linda Shaw, Seattle Times education editor; and Caitlin Moran, Education Lab community engagement editor.



Jane Broom Davidson, Puget Sound director of citizenship and public affairs, Microsoft; and Joane Harrell, UW regent.