

National Association for the Education of Young Children **Call to Action**



for the 112th Congress

NAEYC's Vision of Excellence for Early Childhood Education

All Children have access to a safe, accessible, high-quality early childhood education that includes a developmentally appropriate curriculum, knowledgeable and well-trained program staff and educators, and comprehensive services supporting children's health, nutrition, and social well-being in an environment that respects and supports diversity.

All Early Childhood Professionals are supported with a career ladder, ongoing professional development opportunities, and compensation that attract and retain high-quality educators.

All Families have access to affordable and high-quality early care and education programs and participate in the education and well-being of their children through family involvement in programs and schools.

All Communities and States are accountable for the quality of early childhood programs and support them through the local, state, federal, and private funding needed to deliver quality programs and services, which in turn will produce benefits from their investments by reducing the need for remedial and special education, and lowering teen pregnancy, school dropout rates, and the incidence of juvenile crime.

This vision of excellence is underscored by principles of equity, inclusion, and respect for diversity so that

- All young children receive high-quality early childhood education regardless of the setting or auspice of the program.
- High-quality programs are accessible to all families, regardless of income.
- Effective early education challenges young children and is appropriate to their ages, individual needs, and cultures.
- Early childhood professionals have excellent preparation, ongoing professional development, and compensation commensurate with their qualifications and experience.

America's Prosperity and Potential Depend on High-Quality Early Childhood Education



THE IMPORTANCE of the economic and societal benefits of high-quality early learning and development experiences for all young children, beginning at birth and continuing through the

early grades, is better known and appreciated than ever before. Early childhood as a distinct period of life has value in itself as well as a foundation for later school, work, and life success. Yet we still lack the full policies and resources needed to create an education continuum, grounded in our knowledge of child development, that addresses appropriate standards, curricula, and assessments, along with the specialized teacher professional preparation and support, and with comprehensive services for children and families.

All children deserve access to a high-quality early childhood education, health and mental health services, good nutrition, and family support and security. Yet in the United States—

- 25 million children are younger than age 6. Of those, 46 percent live in low-income families, including 24 percent who live in poor families.
- One in six eligible children receives assistance for child care.
- Roughly half of eligible preschoolers are enrolled in Head Start, and 4 percent of the eligible babies and toddlers are in Early Head Start.
- In households with children younger than 6 years, 23 percent were food insecure at some time during 2009. The Child and Adult Care Food Program still serves less than half of child care.

The long-standing federal commitment, reaching back to the Great Depression, is the linchpin for helping millions of families afford child care and other early childhood programs and helping all settings provide high-quality experiences.

In terms of financing early childhood education, federal funding has been the primary source of public funds, especially for programs serving children from birth until school entry. The federal resources, however, have been insufficient to help the many thousands of eligible children who would benefit from quality early childhood education and inadequate to help state, communities, and local providers ensure high-quality experiences.

Now more than ever, addressing the gaps in policies and resources that will help states, communities, schools, and programs provide the early development and learning experiences children need while helping families work and support their children's education needs focused federal attention. Our nation's economic prosperity and societal potential depend on it.

America's Prosperity

In his September 2010 letter to the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform, James Heckman, Nobel Laureate in Economics, writes,

Data from economists, social scientists and medical experts conclusively shows that the answer is to invest in comprehensive early childhood development—from birth to age five—particularly in disadvantaged children and their families. I strongly urge you to keep this in mind when recommending ways in which to reduce America's debt and increase its productivity.

Ignoring this finding will put our country's future in peril by producing a deficit of human capital that will take generations to correct.

Our failure to make early childhood education a part of economic revitalization will not only shortchange children but also cause greater strain on federal, state, local, and family budgets from increased costs of special education, juvenile incarceration, and school dropout. Further, a highly educated, and fairly compensated early childhood workforce is a driver of the economy.

America's Potential

Our knowledge of how to promote every child's optimal development and learning continues to grow and deepen. Whether young children's full range of development and learning needs are addressed has serious implications for the rest of their lives—in school, in the future workplace, and in their communities.

As a matter of education policy, our national priority should be preventing the achievement gap by reducing the opportunity gap for children from birth through the early grades of school. The gains children make as a result of participation in high-quality programs for younger children diminish in a few years if children do not continue to experience high-quality education in grades K through 3. The promise of the first eight years of life is hard to recapture with catch-up strategies and intervention. By supporting and investing in high-quality early childhood education, we will reap short- and long-term benefits for our children, our society, and our economic security.

Research demonstrates that children's social and emotional

development and behavioral adjustment are important in their own right, both in and out of the classroom. But it now appears that a number of factors in the emotional and social domain, such as independence, responsibility, self-regulation, and cooperation, predict how well children will fare in school and also how, as adults, they will succeed in a 21st century workforce.

NAEYC Recommendations

With appropriate federal policies and funding, all states and communities can develop a well-financed, effective system of early childhood care and education with strong governance, regulation, and oversight; affordable access for all families; standards for programs, professionals, and children's learning and development; valid and useful evaluation for continuous quality improvement; and needed supports for families and children.

These recommendations of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) are grounded in research and evidence that a continuum of developmentally appropriate and challenging standards, curricula, and assessments, as well as comprehensive services and meaningful parent/family engagement from birth through the early elementary grades, can support better development and learning at each stage, more effective transitions among early learning settings, and consistent, shared expectations among settings in which children are served.

NAEYC's "Call to Action" addresses the following eight areas, giving policy recommendations and identifying legislative vehicles for action:

- Reaping national economic benefits by helping children and families thrive.
- Helping families afford and programs provide high-quality development and learning.
- Ensuring a continuum of developmentally appropriate standards, curricula, and instructional assessments from birth through third grade.
- Making every elementary school a ready school.
- Building a high-quality early childhood education system.
- Attracting, educating, and retaining high-quality early childhood teachers and administrators.
- Supporting coordination and continuity among community early childhood providers, schools, and other services for children and families.

Reap National Economic Benefits by Helping Children and Families Thrive

In addition to later cost savings such as reduced special education assignments and lower juvenile delinquency rates, high-quality early child-



hood education opportunities help families be able to work, in turn growing our nation's revenue base. Public investments also create early childhood education jobs, producing further positive economic impact.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Increase funding for the Child Care and Development Block Grant, Head Start and Early Head Start, and early childhood early intervention and special education programs.

Vehicles: Budget and appropriations

Close the Opportunity Gap from Birth to Prevent the Achievement Gap

For many children, poor health and development begin at birth or even at the prenatal stage. The shortage of good child care



and Early Head Start for infants and toddlers has become critical. If we wait until the preschool years and the early grades to “catch up,” we miss an opportunity to make a significant difference in their success in school and in the workplace for which society pays more in financial and other resources.

Some families use child care for children as young as 6 weeks of age because they do not have paid family leave or cannot afford more unpaid leave. According to the Center for Economic and Policy Research, the United States ranks 20th among 21 wealthy nations in length of family leave policy for parents of newborns and last of those nations when it comes to paid leave.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Expand access to Early Head Start, the comprehensive, standards-driven program that serves the nation's babies, toddlers, and families living in poverty. National evaluations of Early Head Start demonstrate its success in supporting positive parenting, child development, and learning. However, current Early Head Start funding levels allow only 4 percent of the eligible infants and toddlers to benefit from this program. Funding should increase to expand the number of young children who can benefit from this program.

Vehicle: Appropriations

Improve the quality of child care for infants and toddlers by requiring states to use funds to focus on infant and toddler care through grants to high-quality programs serving infants and toddlers and to organizations that operate family child care networks and provide technical assistance to other local

providers, and that support statewide networks of specialists to provide training and consultation on high-quality infant and toddler care. Priority for these grants should be on low-income communities.

Vehicle: Reauthorization of the Child Care and Development Block Grant

Expand the Family and Medical Leave Act to allow reasonable paid leave for families with newborn or newly adopted children.

Vehicle: Amendment to the Family and Medical Leave Act

Provide a significant increase in funding for Part C and Section 619 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. For children with developmental delays or disabilities, early interventions provide critical services that enable them to be ready for school.

Vehicle: Appropriations

Help Families Afford and Programs Provide High-Quality Development and Learning

Currently, only one in six eligible children receives assistance from the Child Care and Development Block Grant. Yet the cost of child care is a significant part of a family's budget during the years when parents' earning power is at its lowest. With rising costs of food, utilities, fuel, and other items, the basic necessity of child care is becoming even more difficult for families to access and afford.

Quality cannot be created on the cheap. Salaries should be com-

mensurate with staff members' qualifications and experience in order to be able to attract and retain quality staff. Facilities and equipment need to be safe and up to date. Providers should not have to struggle to meet rising food, utility, and transportation expenses, and reimbursement rates for child care should reflect the cost of high quality.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Increase the number of eligible children receiving child care assistance. Require states to aggressively conduct outreach to identify and serve eligible children, including children whose families are not native English speakers, children with disabilities, and children in underserved areas.

Vehicle: Reauthorization of the Child Care and Development Block Grant

Improve the child care subsidy system and children's access to quality care by requiring states to pay no less than the 75th percentile of a valid and current market rate.

Vehicle: Reauthorization of the Child Care and Development Block Grant

Require states to develop within five years a statewide quality rating and improvement system that provides providers with resources and technical support to reach higher standards of care and education, improve professional development and compensation, and sustain high quality; rate programs on different levels of quality of care; and provide information to families and the public on choosing, promoting, and supporting high-quality care. Require states to pay a higher reimburse-

ment for each of the higher levels of a state quality rating and improvement system, which should be set at the 75th percentile of a higher base rate.

Vehicle: Reauthorization of the Child Care and Development Block Grant

Create a Continuum of Developmentally Appropriate Standards, Curricula, and Instructional Assessment from Birth through Third Grade

A continuum of developmentally appropriate and challenging standards, curricula, and assessments, as well as comprehensive services and meaningful parent/family engagement from birth through the early elementary grades, can support better development and learning at each stage.

Research on the development of young children should form the basis of challenging and reasonable expectations for children. State standards for what children should know and do are an important component of a system of teaching and learning. The National Re-

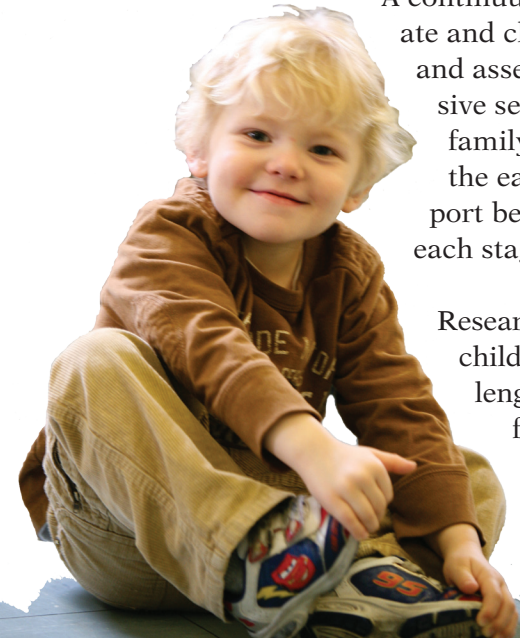
search Council Report, *Early Childhood Assessment: Why, What, and How?* (2008) notes that “A parallel effort to raise the attention of practitioners in the K through 12 arena to the importance of social/emotional development and approaches to learning not only would improve the learning environment for elementary children, it would create a better environment to address alignment issues.”

RECOMMENDATIONS

Require states to review and revise their K through 3 standards to ensure that they address all domains (language, literacy, math, science, social studies, arts, social and emotional development, and approaches to learning) with developmentally reasonable expectations at all levels. Standards should not be developed through a backmapping of the standards for the higher grades. At the district level, ensure that curricula and instructional assessments are consistent with expert recommendations concerning special issues in assessing younger children and are aligned with the standards.

When assessment is directed toward a narrow set of skills, programs may ignore the very competencies that have been shown to build a strong foundation for success in areas including but not limited to academics. As recently as 2008, the National Academies of Science issued cautions about the use of child outcomes assessments for high-stakes purposes.

Make developmental screening available for every child entering school, to the extent feasible and if he or she has not had a



screening in preschool. If such screening identifies a concern, appropriate resources should be available for additional assessment, follow-up, referral, and intervention.

Vehicles: Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act/No Child Left Behind (NCLB); Medicaid improvements

Ensure that teachers and other staff use developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate assessments (including observational assessments) to improve instruction and services for children and that child outcomes assessments are not used for high-stakes decisions.

Vehicle: Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

Make Every Elementary School a Ready School

Nearly 30 years ago the President and the nation's governors announced national education goals, with the first goal being readiness of every child for school. The concept of readiness includes much more than children's readiness. As defined by the National Education Goals Panel, the School Readiness Indicators Initiative, and others, readiness includes ready children, ready families, ready communities, ready early care and education, and ready schools. All are necessary so that our nation's children will experience success.

Ready schools recognize that their mission of academic and social achievement can best be realized when the school admin-

istrators and educators understand and use developmentally appropriate curricula, assessments, and teaching practices; involve and engage families; and work cooperatively with the community to ensure that each child's development and learning needs and abilities are fully supported.

RECOMMENDATION

Elementary schools receiving Title I funds should undertake a ready school assessment on a regular basis, perhaps more frequently if the school is identified as needing improvement.

Vehicle: Elementary and Secondary Education Act

Build a High-Quality Early Childhood Education System

Fragmentation and the lack of adequate resources is being addressed in states as they work to create an early childhood education system. By system, NAEYC means all of the elements that support the provision of high-quality early childhood education for all children: delivery services, preparation and ongoing professional development for all staff, program licensing and accreditation, resource and referral for families, adequate and equitable compensation, appropriate and safe facilities, governance for planning and implementation mechanisms,





family engagement and education, and access to supports for children and families' physical and mental health needs and economic stability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Fund Title VIII Part I of the Higher Education Opportunity Act to accelerate states' implementation of cross-sector, integrated professional development systems that will have a significant impact on quality, compensation, and retention.

Require states' quality rating and improvement

system (QRIS) to have several levels or tiers for rating the quality of programs, starting with licensing standards and leading to nationally recognized program-quality standards. Provide grants to programs to help them improve quality so that they can reach and maintain higher levels on the QRIS (including assistance for training and education, facilities and equipment, and compensation increases).

Vehicle: Reauthorization of the Child Care and Development Block Grant

Require the state Child Care and Development Fund plan to describe how it will link child care to Early Head Start, Head Start,

and state prekindergarten programs that do not provide for a full work day or work year, so those programs can better meet the needs of children of working families.

Vehicle: Reauthorization of the Child Care and Development Block Grant

Require school districts to report to the state and the U.S. Secretary of Education what percentage of Title I funds are spent on children, by age group below kindergarten, and whether the funds are coordinated with other public or private funding to programs and comprehensive services for children younger than kindergarten age. The report should include how such funds expand enrollment for preschool children, create full-day programs, and provide comprehensive services, and it should examine demographic information on the children served by those funds.

Vehicle: Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

Attract, Educate, and Retain High-Quality Early Childhood Teachers and Administrators

Specialized knowledge and skills for teaching young children as well as fair compensation are fundamental to high-quality early childhood education programs. Early childhood is a unique period that deserves teachers' specialized knowledge and skills in how children develop and learn. Fair compensation helps attract and retain high-quality teachers and others who work with

children and programs, yet many staff now are at a salary level that makes them eligible for child care assistance for their own children. The annual teacher turnover rate is estimated to be at least 30 percent—a rate far exceeding that of many other sectors of the economy.

Effective teachers know how to organize the curriculum and use instructional assessments to support each child's learning and engage families as partners in children's development and education. It is the teacher's classroom plans and organization, sensi-

tivity and responsiveness to every child, and moment-to-moment interactions with children that have the greatest impact on early development and learning. The way teachers design

learning experiences, how they engage children and respond to them, how they adapt their teaching and interactions to a child's background, the feedback they give—all these matter greatly in children's learning.

The teacher and administrator evaluation process should be used as a way to inform, improve, and plan for better teaching and a better school climate. Evaluations are more meaningful and more focused if they are seen as part of a continuous improvement process. The unintended consequences of using child assessments (in preschool through third grade) for teacher, principal, and school accountability and associated incentives often put undue test-taking pressure on children instead of building the comprehensive and critical thinking skills needed for 21st century jobs; involve teachers "teaching to the test," which narrows the curriculum; and give inaccurate reflections of children's real abilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Provide joint professional development for teachers of young children in schools, child care programs, state-funded pre-kindergarten, Early Head Start, and Head Start—particularly preschool, kindergarten, and first grade teachers—in all areas of child development (including cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and approaches to learning) and with knowledge of expectations for children's achievement, state early learning standards, the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework, and state K through 3 standards. Attention should be given to appropriate alignment of curricula, assessment, and classroom practices; effective practices in teaching and supporting children and families of diverse backgrounds and experi-



ences, children with disabilities, and children who are English-language learners; and family engagement in children's development and learning.

Vehicle: Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

Teachers in the early elementary grades must

- receive professional development in children's development in all domains and on how to use developmentally appropriate practices, including appropriate selection and use of curricula, assessments, and teacher-child and peer learning interactions.
- be assigned to the grades for which they have specialized credentials (preferably a teacher license in early childhood education) and knowledge, when teaching children in third grade and below.
- participate in joint professional development with child care, Head Start, and state-funded prekindergarten programs in all areas of child development and with attention given to appropriate alignment of curricula, assessment, and classroom practices; effective practices in teaching and supporting children and families of diverse backgrounds and experiences, children with disabilities, and children who are English-language learners; and family engagement in children's development and learning.

Elementary school principals and other administrators (for example, curriculum directors, special education directors, and central office staff) must receive professional development in child development and developmentally appropriate practices, family engagement, collaboration with community-based early childhood education programs and services, and a supportive school climate of diverse cultures, languages, and special needs.

Vehicle: Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

Require states to develop a statewide quality rating and improvement system and require that QRIS systems dedicate resources to increase compensation for early childhood educators. (See fuller details of this proposal at www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/policy/federal/ChildCareAgenda.pdf.)

Vehicle: Reauthorization of the Child Care and Development Block Grant

Conduct a study of the early care and education workforce using state-by-state data on workforce demographics, credentials, and education, and length of time and compensation by program setting (family child care, center child care, Head Start, school, or relative).

Vehicle: Reauthorization of the Child Care and Development Block Grant

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Founded in 1926, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) is the nation's premier organization for early childhood education professionals working with and on behalf of children from birth through age 8. We lead the field through research-based position statements, conferences and publications, standards for professional preparation, NAEYC Accreditation of Programs for Young Children, and ongoing professional development. These efforts help programs improve and families recognize high-quality early care and education. We work with other organizations to advance public policies that promote excellence in all early childhood education settings.



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