



Early Care and Education Consortium

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The Honorable Tom Harkin, Chairman
Committee on Health, Education Labor, and Pensions
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Michael Enzi, Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education Labor, and Pensions
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Enzi:

Thank you for the opportunity to share input from the child care provider community as the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions prepares for the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

The Early Care and Education Consortium (ECEC) is an alliance of America's leading national, regional, and independent providers of quality early learning programs. Consortium members operate nearly 9,000 child care centers enrolling more than 800,000 children from coast to coast in nearly every state. Our members include private non-profit organizations and for-profit companies who offer full-day/full-year programs for children birth through age 12, state-funded prekindergarten, before- and afterschool programs, extended day, and summer programs with enrollments that reflect the rich diversity of our communities and nation.

The child care and early learning programs in the Consortium have a long history of successfully providing high-quality early childhood education, of taking that quality to scale, and often across multiple states and jurisdictions. As the Committee thinks about ways to address early learning in ESEA, it is important to know that there are many high quality early childhood education programs already in place in communities across the country.

It has been our experience, in preparing children for school entry in all of our centers, and in delivering state-funded prekindergarten in more than 20 states, that establishing a relationship with public schools can be a challenge, and the policy and funding silos hold all of us back from doing what young children need. Too often school administrators and early childhood providers live in separate worlds, speak different technical languages, and are cautious about collaboration. Children can't afford this short-sightedness, and ESEA reauthorization offers the opportunity to address this situation in a way that is also fiscally sound.

It's this experience that leads us to offer the following suggestions at the beginning of what we hope will be an ongoing dialogue with the Committee.

The Committee's ability to **approach early learning in ESEA from a "systems" perspective** – not just as part of the K-12 system, but also as part of an emerging early childhood "system" – will be critical to the success of ESEA reauthorization. This early childhood "system" has multiple service and support components, often independent traditions, and unique features. It's not enough to simply consider the

question should we expand or by how much the use of Title I for preschool: that's an institutional approach. It's important to consider how ESEA early learning provisions connect to, support, and enhance efforts through other funding streams and that are already ongoing in community-based settings and schools.

For example, a systems approach would support consideration of:

- Requiring elementary schools to work with local early learning programs like child care and Head Start agencies to promote effective policies and practices that support transition to school, comprehensive services, and that support working families; and,
- Requiring elementary schools using Title I for preschool provide joint professional development opportunities for community-based early childhood teachers and school-based early childhood teachers to better understand child development and developmentally- and culturally-appropriate practices for young children especially those who are dual language learners and children with special needs.

The Committee can also assure the success of ESEA reauthorization by **recognizing the opportunities for leveraging high quality community-based early care and education programs and promoting their use** in the delivery of early learning services. There are literally thousands of high-quality child care programs throughout the U.S. effectively caring for and educating hundreds of thousands of young children every day in facilities designed for young children. Community-based providers have a long history and expertise in working with young children. Working parents look to our centers for full-day and full-year care.

But schools often don't know where these programs are or how to reach out to them. Here, for example, the Committee should consider:

- Requiring local school districts to undertake a community needs assessment before using Title I for preschool, and require that the existing capacity in high quality community-based programs including child care and Head Start be tapped in delivering Title I-funded preschool.

Finally, successful reauthorization also will require a **full appreciation of the unique developmental needs of young children and their implications for program practice**. Simply "pushing downward" a K-12 model will not work. Young children have different developmental needs, which demand different instructional approaches and curricula, and age-appropriate accountability mechanisms. Yet in most cases schools have not taken steps to formally ensure they are fully ready to meet the needs of young children transitioning from community-based child care and early learning programs. The Committee should consider:

- Requiring elementary schools to be "ready schools" – in the manner the National Education Goals Panel defined the key elements of ready schools – and to engage in a periodic ready school assessment like that developed by HighScope Educational Research Foundation.

The Early Care and Education Consortium stands ready to share the expertise of our staff and members as the Committee attends to early learning within the context of ESEA reauthorization. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Eric J. Karolak, Ph.D.
Executive Director