



November 21, 2008

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Re: A National Early Learning Initiative

Dear Senator Daschle,

Early Childhood Development/Early Learning may be the most important platform in President Elect Obama's *change* agenda.

The performance gap in our schools is an indicator of a bigger issue: The readiness gap for children entering school. We are nationally approaching 50% of our children NOT being ready for school at age five. Research is clear that children who start behind often stay behind, at great cost to themselves, to families, to communities, and to society.

Within ten years, we must have all of our children ready to succeed when they start school. If we fail at this, we risk failure as a nation over the long haul. To succeed in having our children ready to succeed, we must bring focus and a unified framework to the issue of early childhood development in our local communities.

To that end, find enclosed a proposed community-based framework every community can use to get to the key early childhood development questions, and to create answers based on local existing community platforms/program elements.

We believe these ideas will prove useful as you begin to work through the vital issue of early learning, and move President Elect Obama's **Zero to Five Plan** forward. If we can help in any way, please don't hesitate to call.

Sincerely,

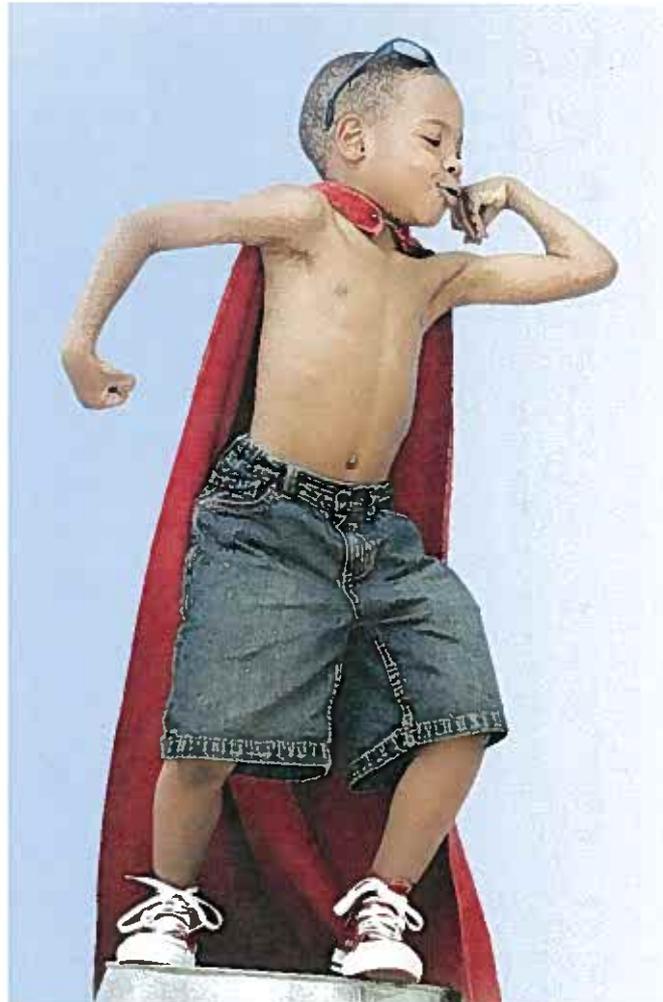
E. Rick Allen, Ph.D.  
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Enc.



# A National Early Learning Initiative

## Proposed Community-Based Framework







A Community-Based Framework  
For Advancing  
Early Learning  
As  
A Major National Initiative

Ethan R. (Rick) Allen, Ph.D.  
President, United Way of Pierce County  
Tacoma, WA



A major national Early Learning Initiative can best be defined as a national response to the research that is now clear about the vital importance of children being ready to succeed when they start school. If children start behind, they generally stay behind, with multiple negative consequences to families, communities, and society.

Now, nearly 50% of our children starting school nationwide are NOT ready to succeed, and they are failing in school and life at higher and higher rates.

The PERFORMANCE GAP we see in schools is, by and large, a symptom of a greater issue: a READINESS GAP upon starting school.

**The Mission: To ensure our children are ready to succeed upon starting school.**

Research suggests that the first five years of life are the greatest learning years and the years that depend the most on parents and, in today's reality, on secondary caregivers. Where parents and secondary care givers fall short of providing INTENTIONAL DEVELOPMENTAL CARE, the children often fall short in school and later in life.

This must change, and can change. We already know that evidence-based practices can help parents and children and caregivers succeed. However, the framework for addressing Early Learning is, at best, unstructured in most communities.



CREATING A FOCUSED AND SUSTAINABLE  
NATIONAL EARLY LEARNING MOVEMENT  
THAT IS DRIVEN AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL



## FRAMEWORK

Community Early Learning systems, what few there are, suffer from a lack of common framework. Each community has multiple early childhood program elements, rarely coordinated or leveraged, lacking synergy within the loosely-based system.

There are many well-intentioned “random acts of kindness” in Early Learning. We must bring focus and discipline and synergy to these efforts, through a common framework.

Here’s how:

1. Money is a powerful incentive: Provide funding for communities that meet focused criteria around a common framework (see below);
2. Communities, through local United Ways, will be asked to develop Early Learning business plans answering these simple questions:
  - a. Where are the children 0-5 years of age in our community?
  - b. Who is caring for them?
  - c. How well are they doing in providing intentional developmental care?
  - d. How can we in our community help them succeed?
  - e. What existing community administrative platforms already reach the people we want to help: parents, providers, children?
  - f. What platforms do we need to build and connect to evidence-based programs to help these folks?
  - g. How will we measure our success, learn, and make adjustments?

The answers to these questions in each county or large community will provide a business plan and a focused framework for success in developing a community-based Early Learning System. By design, they will be customized efforts, with different approaches based on the answers to the above questions. But in all cases, they will be based on community strengths and existing community platforms to be leveraged for greater gain.



## FUNDING

The effort will be funded through Early Learning Legacy Partners emanating from the national level, through local United Ways ONLY IF an acceptable business plan is developed AND some level of actual matching cash, committed from local municipalities and local businesses and foundations, are part of the business plan.



**PROCESS:**

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Warren Buffett Foundation (both of which are already committed to this issue) are approached by the Obama administration and asked to join with the federal government as Early Learning Legacy Partners. This high-visibility partnership will form a large “national challenge matching pool,” which national corporate partners will then be asked to join (also as Early Learning Legacy Partners).

1. The Gates and Buffet foundations make a 10 year commitment as Early Learning Legacy Partners (E.g., \$100 million per year each, for 10 years); to be matched (double challenge) by:
  - a. Federal Government @ \$500 million per year for 10 years
  - b. National corporations make 10 year funding commitments as Early Learning Legacy Partners (e.g., 100 corporations @ \$2 million per year for 10 years);
2. United Way of America acts as the fiscal agent, annually receiving \$900 million a year from above, with only 1% taken for administrative costs.
  - a. This administrative fee would pay mainly for business plan analysis and grant awards, then roll-up evaluation.
  - b. The program fiscal pass-through would go directly to local United Ways in local communities to fund/contract with local Early Learning Consortiums with acceptable business plans and matching funds from the local community.
3. Example grants to local communities:

No. of Grants	Annual Match	Total Population	Total Funds Available
25	\$8 Million	2 million	\$200 Million
15	\$6 Million	1-2 million	\$90 Million
100	\$4 Million	500,000 – 1 million	\$400 Million
100	\$1 Million	< 500,000	\$100 Million

5. This effort will be simultaneously accompanied by an expansion of the federal Head Start program.



### ADDITIONAL BUSINESS PLAN ELEMENTS:

- Focus on parent/child relationship as essential element
- Multicultural sensitivity as essential element
- Quality Improvements in Licensed Care as essential element
- Advocacy/Community Education as essential element
- Advocacy at local and state level essential element



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