



Suggestions for the Transition Team

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We need the equivalent of a Marshall Plan to transform and improve the skills of those working with children from birth to 3 years of age.

The teaching force available to care for birth to three year olds is largely unprofessional in qualifications, poorly educated about child development and family dynamics, and in need of expert leadership, training, and supervision. Systematic efforts must be committed to raising the quality of the those working with this age group. This will require that a significant initiative be launched to create excellent higher education programs, recruit talented individuals to enroll in these programs, and improve the salaries and working conditions of these caregivers so that those new to the field—as well as caregivers with more experience, who will receive additional training—can be retained and enjoy a satisfying career.

Results from high-stakes tests administered to young children should not be used as proxies for teacher quality or child learning.

High-stakes tests—those that provide rewards or sanctions for teachers, children, or programs—are inconsistent with meaningful educational outcomes in the first few years of life and at the outset of school. This is a time of dramatic developmental change, a critical period of transition from home to school, and an interval of heightened sensitivity to socialization and exploration. It is not a time to highlight failure or to impose narrow views of learning and achievement. High-stakes tests typically ignore the contexts in which children are being reared. They overlook the differences in children's cognitive and affective baselines and their opportunities to learn. They also suggest a homogeneity about learning, which is very questionable during the volatile years of early development. We need, instead, to focus our assessment efforts on two complementary approaches: instructional assessment, based on performance measures, in order to improve programs; and program evaluations, which combine both inputs and outcomes, in order to determine the effectiveness of public investments in these critically important years.