



naeyc® Promoting excellence in early childhood education

Since 1926

National Association for the Education of Young Children

1313 L Street NW, Suite 500, Washington, DC 20005-4101

202-232-8777 800-424-2460

Fax 202-328-1846

www.naeyc.org

December 3, 2008

President-Elect Obama Transition
1608 Rhode Island Avenue, NW
Washington, DC

Dear President-Elect Obama:

The next Congress and Administration will have unique challenges and opportunities confronting them. The challenges brought by national economic decline include families struggling to afford the basics of housing, rising fuel and food costs, and lack of high quality, affordable early childhood education programs.

We support the recommendations made by the campaign on early childhood education and look forward to working with you to advance increased investment for our foundation programs of child care and Head Start that have been starved of new resources for nearly eight years, to fund and implement new provisions of the Higher Education Opportunity Act that will lead to a better educated and compensated early childhood workforce, and development of a new initiative to promote a greater supply of high quality programs in all early childhood education settings and sectors.

NAEYC, the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the nation's premier association of early childhood professionals working with and on behalf of children from birth to third grade, strongly believes that our nation cannot wait any longer to make a high quality, well-financed system of early childhood education in every state and community a national priority. Policymakers, families and the public look to NAEYC for its standards for teacher preparation and for high quality early childhood education programs through its voluntary, national accreditation system. In addition, teachers, administrators and policy decision-makers rely on NAEYC's research-based position statements on early childhood curriculum and assessment, early literacy and mathematics, developmentally appropriate practice, and other critical issues for the development and learning of children from birth through age 8.

NAEYC will publicly launch in December our Call to Action for the 111th Congress and the new Administration, *Preventing the Gap, Sustaining Success*, to urge a much greater federal commitment to the goal of providing all children with the early development and learning experiences that make them successful in school and beyond. This commitment must support families' access to high quality programs and resources for program providers to meet high quality standards. Early childhood education helps families be part



of an economic recovery in the short term and saves resources over the long term. If we support and invest in high quality early childhood education, we will reap current and future benefits for our children, our society, and our nation's economic security.

I. First 100 Days

Economic Recovery

An economic stimulus or recovery package must include **at least \$1 billion of new funding each for the Child Care & Development Block Grant and for Head Start**. Significant new funds for these programs will help many more struggling families with work and help children reap the benefits of high quality early learning that save future expenses to them and our nation. Child care and other early childhood programs help America prosper and reach its potential. Working families cannot keep or take new jobs without child care assistance. High quality, comprehensive programs such as Early Head Start and Head Start help lift families from poverty by supporting children's learning and helping families tackle social and financial duress. Economists such as Nobel laureate James Heckman and Ben Bernanke note that investments in high quality early childhood education reaps significant economic benefits.

In addition, early childhood education is a jobs-growth area. As more and more families need child care to work, there is a growing demand for a highly knowledgeable and skilled early childhood workforce. When we grow enrollments in Early Head Start and Head Start, there is job creation for a range of positions such as teachers, family services counselors, and other related services.

In addition, we recommend funds for the **higher education loan forgiveness opportunities for early childhood educators enacted in the 2008 Higher Education Opportunity Act**. By creating incentives for college graduates to become early childhood educators, more early childhood programs will be able to attract and retain high quality teachers.

We also encourage you to provide funding for **child care and Head Start facility modernization**. Many early childhood centers cannot expand to meet the growing number of families who need or desire early childhood programs for their children without construction of additional classrooms. In order to serve younger children and children with disabilities, many programs need to renovate their facilities to become developmentally appropriate and conducive to children's learning.

II. Action in the First Year

Work With Congress to Pass a Fiscal Year Budget and Appropriations that Demonstrates Early Childhood Education as a Federal Priority

The President's first budget request will signal the priorities of his Administration. The early childhood education field was elated to see the Obama-Biden campaign call for



significant new investments in child care, Head Start and other early childhood education programs. The President should work with Congress to invest **an additional \$10 billion in fiscal year 2010 for the Child Care & Development Block Grant, Early Head Start and Head Start, and to raise the quality of programs for children birth to five years old across settings and sectors.** Investments in expanded access to programs and in raising the quality of programs must go hand in hand. After eight years of nearly flat funding for the foundation programs for poor and low-income working families, a significant increase in the Child Care & Development Block Grant and Head Start would help many of the eligible families who have either lost assistance or been on long waiting lists, enroll more eligible children into comprehensive programs, and create new job growth in the early childhood education field.

Three new elements of the 2008-enacted Higher Education Opportunity Act with adequate funding would help build a high quality early childhood workforce in child care, Head Start and state prekindergarten settings. Specifically, early childhood educators now are eligible for **loan forgiveness under the Perkins, Direct, and Stafford financial aid programs.** To make loan forgiveness available for prospective borrowers, there must be a sizeable increase in discretionary funds for the loan forgiveness provisions. While loan forgiveness is not a silver-bullet response to helping low-wage early childhood educators attain degrees in early childhood education, it is an important component of a financial aid package and for recruiting and retaining individuals with education into this critical education field. The second provision is an expansion of the **Title II Teacher Quality Partnerships grants, which if they include an early childhood education program in the local partnership,** can use funds to help improve preparation and mentoring of early childhood educators as well as provide compensation bonuses for those who earn a higher education degree. Lastly, a new provision in **Title VIII of the Act** would provide **grants to states to develop and implement a cross-sector, comprehensive, state-based professional development system for early childhood professionals working with children from birth through age 5.** By creating systems based on research, standards, and quality assurance mechanisms, we can build a stronger, more knowledgeable and fairly compensated early childhood workforce that will provide high quality experiences to children in the range of services used by their families before they arrive at kindergarten.

Another overlooked area of the federal budget for many years has been the **Part C and preschool special education grants** that provide intervention and education services to young children with disabilities. These are the most difficult services for many families to access and can provide the early interventions needed to help these children be ready for school.

Expand and Improve the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit To Help More Low and Middle Income Families

The Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit (DCTC) currently assists 6.5 million families with the costs of child care. By improving the tax credit, more families at both the lower and middle income levels will have relief for this critical family expense. In his



campaign, President-elect Obama recommended improvements to the DCTC that would make the credit **refundable** and allow low- to moderate-income families to receive a credit of up to 50 percent for allowable child care expenses. Other improvement strategies include an adjustment in expense limits and indexing the expense limits and sliding scale for inflation.

Provide Greater Access to Nutritious Meals through the Child and Adult Care Food Program

The reauthorization of the **Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)**, scheduled for 2009, should include expanded access for children enrolled in family child care homes and child care centers. CACFP provides both meals and snacks and routine monitoring and technical assistance that helps programs improve their quality. Family child care providers in particular are the bulk of infant and toddler providers and need special attention. The means test for children enrolled in family child care homes should be revised or eliminated and would reduce the paperwork burden for providers.

Incentivize the Growth of High Quality Early Childhood Programs

We support the campaign's call for **birth-to-five incentive grants to states**, coordinated with the state early learning advisory councils required under the Head Start Act of 2007 and state early childhood public/private partnerships. These grants should be used not only to help plan better coordinated systems but also to close gaps in access for children and quality among providers. They should help programs like Head Start and Early Head Start and special education early childhood programs serve more children and meet new requirements of quality, and they should help support improvements in child care for birth to five and preschool programs. These grants would help states address gaps in services to young children with particular emphasis on supporting infants and toddlers, English language learners, and children whose income is too high to be eligible for Early Head Start and Head Start but who use out-of-home services.

Improve Education Achievement by Coordination with Community and Family and Developmentally Appropriate Instruction

As reauthorization moves forward on the **Elementary & Secondary Education Act/No Child Left Behind**, we urge the Administration to create better connections between children's achievement in schools and the strengths and weakness of their community and family environments. **The instruction in classrooms must be connected to ensuring children have the services that bolster their physical and mental health, enrich their experiences, and support family stability.** School administrators, principals and teachers need an understanding of **developmentally appropriate practices, curriculum and assessment** that meet children where they are in their learning and that enable them to reach challenging expectations for their educational achievement. As many school systems implement full-day kindergarten and prekindergarten classrooms, it is critical that principals understand young children's development and learning and that teachers assigned to those classrooms have specialized



knowledge in effective practices with young children. Early childhood educators in community settings and teachers in school-based prekindergarten, kindergarten, and first grade classrooms should have the opportunity to participate in **joint professional development** so that there will be shared understandings of the continuum of development and learning as well as shared, appropriate expectations for children's variation in this period in their life while moving them to meet high learning standards.

Create stronger coordination across federal agencies regarding research, data collection, and dissemination

In the area of research, NAEYC recommends retaining the early childhood education center funded by the Institute for Education Sciences, and creating better **coordination between the Department of Education's research offices and the National Institute of Child Health and Development**, particularly on effective practices with children with challenging behaviors, supporting children who are English language learners and development.

Begin a dialogue leading to the reauthorization of the Child Care & Development Block Grant and improve the Family and Medical Leave Act

The **Child Care & Development Block Grant (CCDBG)** has not been reauthorized since 1996. Millions of children receive their early care and education in family child care and center-based child care settings. For eight years, CCDBG has been flat funded despite an unmet need of six out of seven eligible children. As families try to keep jobs or take new job opportunities, the lack of affordable, quality child care is a significant barrier. As we move forward as a nation to improve the quality of early childhood programs, we must recognize that this requires a heightened focus on providing resources to child care programs to attract and retain well-educated and skilled staff, to meet high program standards that set the conditions for positive development and learning, and to select and use curricula, assessments and other materials that based on evidence and research are most likely to benefit the children in the specific program. A blueprint for the reauthorization has been developed jointly by national and state early childhood organizations.

For many families, the lack of paid family and medical leave requires them to place their children in out-of-home care even as early as six weeks of age. **Expanding the Family and Medical Leave Act** to allow a reasonable period of paid leave for families with newborn or newly adopted children would help families emotionally but also delay the higher costs of infant care.

III. Executive Action in the First Year

Currently, the two major federal early childhood programs—the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) and Head Start—are in separate parts of HHS. The Child Care Bureau is located within the Office of Family Assistance, where it is primarily focused on providing child care as a work support for families receiving or moving off of



Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), although CCDBG funds are also intended to serve low-income families not receiving TANF and to improve the quality of child care. A new **Office of Early Childhood Development and Learning in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services** would allow for greater coordination to reach the full effectiveness of early childhood programs.

In order to maximize early childhood education funding streams and corollary programs, such as but not limited to the Child and Adult Care Food Program, Child Care & Development Block Grant, Early Head Start and Head Start, Early Reading First and Even Start, Higher Education Opportunity Act provisions, and Department of Labor apprenticeship grants, there should be an **Interagency Coordination effort for early childhood development and education that would lead to the establishment of a National Council on Early Childhood Development and Learning** to coordinate the array of programs, data, research and dissemination regarding young children and their families and the early childhood workforce, and to raise national attention to the importance of high quality early childhood education.

We look forward to working with you and the 111th Congress to pass legislation that will emphasize the needs of America's families and children in our economy recovery package that provides short term and long term success for America's families that makes a strong federal commitment

Sincerely,

Mark R. Ginsberg, Ph.D
Executive Director