



Recommendations for Presidential Transition Team

Response to questions on Early Childhood Education/Families

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Overview:

These remarks and recommendations pertain largely to early childhood education, child care, and K-12 policies. The issues as I see them are a) expanding the current system of services to the set of children and families most likely to benefit from them; b) ensuring the quality and effectiveness of early education and child care programs that receive public funding; c) aligning the early education system with the early years of k-12 to ensure efficiency and increase effectiveness of these assets. I am focusing primarily on programs that reach children starting at about age 2 and, although they may be privately-run or even family-based, could receive public funds in some form.

Expansion of the service delivery system

There is considerable evidence from experimental and non-experimental large-scale studies that growth and development in the 0-5 period is critical to subsequent success in school and in life, and experiences in child care, preschool, pre-kindergarten, and the early grades of school can be assets for promoting such growth and development. When delivered with even modest levels of “quality” (see “b” below) these experiences *can* help close achievement gaps evident at the start of school and have effects that *may* last for some time. Economic and social benefits have been attributed to such experiences. Given the very clear evidence that marked skill gaps exist at the start of school, experiences in child care, preschool, and pre-kindergarten settings can be seen as an investment to close such gaps and promote benefits to children and families (for parents this is largely linked to their employment). Evidence is also clear that although these programs appear to benefit all children to some extent, they have the biggest impacts (roughly half the achievement gap) for disadvantaged children and when children are exposed more than 20 hours per week (i.e., full-time). The central question here is whether and to what extent public funds should be used to expand enrollment in early childhood education (again, roughly between 2-5 years of age). Of note is that economically advantaged parents purchase such care for their children.

Policy Recommendation: Political, economic, and scientific realities all militate against a move to universal access to publicly-funded early education and care for children 2-5 (or even 0-5). Facilities do not exist, trained professionals are in limited supply, and the scientific evidence base is stretched thin when arguments are made for universal approaches. However, there is a considerable need for expanding the current delivery system to reach more disadvantaged children. **Increased funds to raise the threshold of access to public subsidies and publicly-funded programs are needed.**

Estimates of between \$3 and \$5 billion have been suggested for expansion of existing programs to universal or close to universal. **Assure access to children aged 2-5 from**



families making 2.5 times the Federal poverty guidelines. Costs would be between \$2 and \$3 billion.

Ensuring quality and effectiveness

Public investments (Federal and state) in early education for children aged 2-5 exceed \$35 billion annually according to some recent estimates. There is considerable evidence that the programs and experiences provided by these investments are underperforming with regard to quality and effectiveness. Politically, this underperformance creates an argument for reducing funding for early education. Historically, investments have been tied to metrics of quality (e.g., group size, ratio, teacher degree status, physical environment, health and safety) that, although important, do not translate into skill gains for children. The evidence on this is very clear. Rather, teacher's actual behavior in classrooms interacting with children has been shown consistently to predict skills gains, and can be assessed using standardized observational procedures that prior experience and evidence have shown to be scalable as a monitoring tool (e.g. such as when used in Head Start or statewide programs), and can improve with targeted professional development. Moreover professional development focused on teacher-child interactions in early learning environments has produced skill gains in children.

In sum, levels of quality and children's skill gains in early education are unacceptably low. **A new generation of monitoring tools and professional development supports are needed to improve the current system and assured that an expanded system delivers on its promise.**

Policy recommendations

- 1) Require programs receiving public funds to:
 - Participate in regular monitoring of classroom quality using standardized observational assessments of teacher-child interactions (as is being launched in Head Start).
 - Conduct regular, standardized, developmentally-oriented assessments of student skills in language, literacy, math, and social development
 - Enroll teachers in performance-focused professional development that has been shown to be effective in scientific studies linked to child outcomes.
- 2) Change the incentives and supports for the early childhood workforce from a degree-oriented system to one that focuses and rewards performance in the classroom. Provide teachers with monetary incentives (salary increments) to participate in effective professional development. Provide program directors and teachers monetary rewards for "moving up" according to observed quality benchmarks.

Aligning early education and care with k-12

There is no organized system of early education and care in the United States. This is the time to create one and tie it directly into the k-12 system. Funding, program monitoring, teacher qualifications and workforce enhancement, child assessment,



curriculum and program development, and family support/engagement are all distributed across too many sources, auspices, and resources. The inefficiencies economically, educationally, and developmentally are staggering.

Policy recommendations:

- 1) Create a national office of early education and care responsible for coordinating across the various Departments (Education, HHS) and agencies (Head Start). Place budgetary, planning, and evaluation authority within this office. Eliminate budgetary and programmatic boundaries across agencies and funding streams serving young children. Frame the authority of this office as covering birth-8. Hold it accountable for closing the achievement gap by age 8.
- 2) Invest in research and program development to raise the quality of program offerings, including a) assessments of skill development in young children, particularly dual language learners; b) measurement of teacher effectiveness, and c) teacher professional development that produces skill gains. Ensure research is targeted to rigorous scientific studies including large-scale experiments of putatively effective programs and professional development.
- 3) Create incentives for school districts and local early education programs to partner with one another in a “p-3” model of early education. Require aligned curricula, assessments, and teacher professional development.