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December 19, 2008

President-elect Obama Education Policy Transition Team & Health and Human Services Transition Team  
**RE: Recommendations for Young Dual-language Learners**

To Whom It May Concern:

On behalf of Teaching Strategies Inc. (TSI), I am pleased to submit the enclosed memorandum providing recommendations for improving the quality of early childhood education programs for young dual-language learners (DLLs).

TSI is a national leader in providing high-quality educational services to programs serving young children. I founded the company because I believe that our country's future depends on our ability to nurture the optimal growth of every child. Our mission is to enhance the quality of early childhood programs by offering practical, innovative, and developmentally and culturally appropriate curriculum materials, professional development, and parenting resources. Our materials and services are used by a majority of Head Start programs throughout the country, including programs run by all branches of the military and Department of Defense schools worldwide.

I started my career as one of the first education coordinators for the Head Start program in the mid-sixties in Holly Springs, Mississippi and have over 40 years experience in early childhood education. One of the most dramatic changes that I have observed throughout my career is the growing diversity of our nation's young children. Today, almost one-quarter of all children in preschool education programs are dual-language learners. TSI has made it a priority to support early childhood professionals in responding to the unique needs of DLL children and their parents. We believe that leadership at the federal level is necessary to ensure that these children receive the enduring benefits that a high-quality early learning experience can provide.

TSI lauds President-elect Obama's commitment to America's young children and stands eager to be of assistance on this and other important issues. Please do not hesitate to call on us.

Sincerely,

Diane Trister Dodge  
President & Founder



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## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Ian Bassin, Olivia Golden, David Kirp, Kris Gutierrez, Joan Lombardi, Ray Mabus, Steve Robinson, Jon Vaupel  
**FROM:** Diane Trister Dodge, President, Teaching Strategies Inc.   
**DATE:** December 19, 2008  
**RE:** Young Dual-language Learners: Recommendations to the Obama Administration

Teaching Strategies, Inc. (TSI) urges President-elect Obama to ensure that young dual-language learner<sup>1</sup> children (DLL) are a central focus of his early childhood education agenda. A majority of DLL children begin their school careers, not in kindergarten, but in a preschool program. Recent enrollment trends indicate that DLLs are participating in early childhood programs such as Head Start, child care, and state prekindergarten in greater numbers. In fact, a recent survey of Head Start found that *only* 16% of programs nationwide reported serving English-speaking children exclusively.<sup>i</sup> As you are aware, our nation's public education system has struggled to improve the academic outcomes and high school completion rates for DLLs. TSI believes that access to a high-quality early education programs helps to narrow the achievement gap for young DLLs upon kindergarten entry and promotes their long-term academic success.

To effectively respond to the needs of DLL children and their families, our current early childhood system must be enhanced. While the early childhood system is heavily focused on scientifically based instruction, there is a dearth of information regarding what instructional methods and curricular approaches are most successful for young DLLs. In addition, too few early childhood teachers are prepared to work with DLL children in their classrooms. For example, a recent survey of U.S. early childhood teacher preparation programs, conducted by Barbara Bowman and Aisha Ray of the Erikson Institute, found that the vast majority of these programs fail to provide teachers with the necessary preparation to work with children with diverse needs, including DLLs.<sup>ii</sup>

In order to address these issues, TSI recommends that President-elect Obama and the Congress undertake the following initial actions:

1. **Invest in a robust DLL research and development (R&D) agenda.** The Department of Education (DOE) and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) should collaborate on the development and implementation of a R&D agenda that includes, but is not limited to, the following goals:
  - Increase the number of rigorous studies examining the efficacy of home language instruction for DLL preschool-aged children
  - Collect and disseminate information regarding effective instructional strategies, curricula, and assessments, and home and classroom-based activities that support DLLs in making progress in all domains of early childhood development
  - Develop assessment instruments that are appropriate and normed for young DLLs

<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this document, the term dual-language learner refers to children ages birth to age five who live in an environment where a home language other than English is spoken. Note that references to "limited English proficient" children are used for the purposes of consistency with federal education law. The meaning of this term is similar to the definition of dual-language learners.



- Provide guidance to the early childhood education field regarding the appropriate selection and use of assessment instruments and protocols for assessing young DLLs
  - Require all research conducted by DOE and HHS on young children to be disaggregated data by race, ethnicity, and language status
  - Require DOE and HHS to report gains for DLLs in both their home language and the English language in all research and program evaluations
- 2. Train and prepare early childhood educators to work with DLLs.** All teachers should benefit from knowledge regarding how to teach DLLs in both their formal preparation and on-going professional development. In addition, given the importance of providing DLLs instruction in their home language, it is imperative that investments are made to develop well-prepared bilingual early childhood educators. These goals can be best accomplished by the following:
- Ensuring that early childhood providers receive necessary funds to allow for ongoing training and professional development for teachers, particularly those who lack expertise in serving DLLs
  - Implementing a federal grants program which funds partnerships between institutions of higher education and early childhood providers to increase the numbers of bilingual early childhood teachers with postsecondary degrees
  - Implementing a federal grants program to build the capacity of institutions of higher education to prepare teachers to work with DLLs by (1) investing in hiring new faculty with expertise in these issues, and (2) developing coursework and certifications specific to the needs of DLLs
- 3. Pass the Providing Resources to Improve Dual-Language Education Act (PRIDE), H.R.3842.** The PRIDE Act, introduced by Congresswoman Hilda Solis (D-CA), would expand access to high-quality, dual-language education for low-income children in preschool through fifth grade. This is important because recent data show dual-language education is less available to young children in low-income schools, particularly those which serve a majority of African-American and Hispanic children. In addition, this legislation funds new research on the efficacy of dual-language models that are implemented during the preschool years and continue throughout elementary school.

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<sup>i</sup> *Dual Language Learning: What Does It Take?* Head Start Dual Language Report, Office of Head Start, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. 2008.

<sup>ii</sup> Ray, Aisha, and Bowman, Barbara, and Jean Robbins, *Preparing All Early Childhood Educators to Successfully Educate All Children: The Contributions of Four Year Undergraduate Teacher Preparation Programs*, Erikson Institute, Chicago: October 2006.