



# Early Care and Education Consortium

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## Early Learning Stakeholders Meeting U.S. Department of Education January 29, 2010

### Comments of Eric Karolak, Executive Director

Thank you for the opportunity to share with you thoughts from the child care provider community as you prepare for the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

The Early Care and Education Consortium (ECEC) is an alliance of America's leading national, regional, and independent providers of quality early learning programs. Consortium members operate nearly 9,000 child care centers enrolling more than 800,000 children from coast to coast in nearly every state. Our members include private non-profit organizations and for-profit companies who offer full-day/full-year programs for children birth through age 12, state-funded prekindergarten, before- and afterschool programs, extended day, and summer programs with enrollments that reflect the rich diversity of our communities and nation.

The child care and early learning programs in the Consortium have a long history of successfully providing high-quality early childhood education, often delivering these at scale and over multiple sites and jurisdictions. As the Department of Education thinks about ways to address early learning in ESEA, it is important to know that there are many high quality early childhood education programs already in place in communities across the country.

It has been our experience, in preparing children for school entry in all of our centers, and in delivering state-funded prekindergarten in more than 20 states, that establishing a relationship with public schools can be a challenge. Too often school administrators and early childhood providers live in separate worlds, speak different technical languages, and are cautious about collaboration. Children can't afford this short-sightedness, and ESEA reauthorization offers the opportunity to address this situation in a way that is also fiscally sound.

It's this experience that leads us to offer the following suggestions at the beginning of what we hope will be an ongoing dialogue with the Department and the other stakeholders in this room.

The Department's ability to **approach early learning in ESEA from a "systems" perspective** – not just as part of the K-12 system, but also as part of an emerging early childhood "system" will be critical to the success of ESEA reauthorization. This "system" has multiple service and support components, often independent traditions, and unique features. The Early Learning Challenge Fund in House-passed legislation developed with the Administration outlines the elements of state early learning systems; this with other existing policies and funding streams will need to come together in a meaningful way to be implemented by program providers. It's not enough to simply consider the question should we expand or by how much the use of Title I for preschool. That's an institutional approach. It's important to consider how ESEA early learning provisions connect to, support, and

enhance efforts through other funding streams and that are already operating in community-based settings and schools.

For example, a systems approach would support consideration of:

- Requiring schools to work with local early learning programs like child care and Head Start agencies to promote effective policies and practices that support transition to school, comprehensive services, and that support families; and,
- Requiring schools using Title I for preschool provide joint professional development opportunities for community-based early childhood teachers and school-based early childhood teachers to better understand child development and developmentally- and culturally-appropriate practices for young children especially those who are dual language learners and children with special needs.

The Department can also assure the success of ESEA reauthorization by **recognizing the opportunities for leveraging high-quality community-based early care and education programs and promoting their use by schools** in the delivery of early learning services. There are literally thousands of high-quality child care programs throughout the U.S. effectively caring for and educating hundreds of thousands of young children everyday in facilities designed for young children. Community-based providers have a long history and expertise in working with young children. Working parents look to our centers for full-day and full-year care.

But schools often don't know where these programs are or how to reach out to them. Here the Department should consider:

- Requiring local school districts to undertake a community needs assessment before using Title I for preschool, and require that the existing capacity in high-quality community-based programs including child care and Head Start be tapped in delivering Title I-funded preschool.

Finally, successful reauthorization also will require a **full appreciation of the unique developmental needs of young children and their implications for program practice**. Simply "pushing downward" a K-12 model will not work. Young children have different developmental needs, which demand different instructional approaches and curricula, and age-appropriate accountability mechanisms. The Early Care and Education Consortium stands ready to share the expertise of our staff and members as the Department attends early learning within the context of ESEA reauthorization.