

NAEYC's Call to Action

for the 111th Congress and the New Administration



**Prevent the Gap, Sustain Children's Successes,
and Reap Economic Benefits for the Nation
by Helping Young Children and Their Families Thrive**

National Association for the Education of Young Children



Founded in 1926, the **National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)** is the nation's premier organization for early childhood education professionals. We lead the field through research-based position statements, conferences and publications, standards for professional preparation, NAEYC Accreditation of Programs for Young Children, and ongoing professional development. These efforts help programs improve and families recognize high-quality early care and education. We work with other organizations to advance public policies that promote excellence in all early childhood education settings.



Prevent the Gap, Sustain Children's Successes, and Reap Economic Benefits for the Nation

by Helping Young Children and Their Families Thrive

The 111th Congress and the new Administration face unique challenges and critical choices. Among the challenges in bolstering the national economy is how to ease the daily struggle of American families to afford housing, fuel, food, and health care and to find affordable high-quality care and education programs for their young children. The current focus on closing the education achievement gap is too narrow and those efforts begin too late in children's lives. We must commit to preventing a gap among children in their healthy development and learning and to sustaining their success in school and in life. 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

By making significant increases in child care, Head Start, and other early childhood education programs* through federal economic recovery efforts and appropriate funding levels each year, we can stabilize employment for working families and we can help support the early childhood workforce with adequate compensation, professional development, and sufficient program resources. By helping families whose children attend early childhood education programs such as child care centers, Early Head Start, and Head Start, we ensure that parents are not burdened and anxious as they strive to work and support their families.

* For the purposes of this paper, the term *early childhood education program* includes center-based child care and family child care homes, Early Head Start and Head Start, state-funded prekindergarten, and schools serving children from birth to age 8.

Over the last eight years, federal investments in early childhood education programs have been stagnant. Only one in seven eligible children now receives child care assistance. Fewer than 5% of eligible infants and toddlers are enrolled in Early Head Start, and fewer than 50% of our nation's poorest preschoolers are able to enroll in Head Start. Special education services for very young children cannot keep up with the demand and need for specialized services.

Our failure to make early childhood education a part of economic revitalization will not only shortchange children but also cause greater strain on federal, state, local, and family budgets from increased costs of special education, juvenile incarceration, and school dropout. Further, a robust, educated, and well-compensated early childhood workforce is a driver of the economy by employing hundreds of thousands of individuals whose economic situations are threatened when we fail to invest in the services that they provide families and children. **As a matter of economic policy, we need a *greater federal investment that reaps economic benefits for the nation by helping children and families thrive.***

As a matter of education policy, our national priority should be *preventing a gap among children in their healthy, positive development and learning and sustaining their success in school and in life.* The period of early childhood—birth through age 8—and children's experiences and access to high-quality, comprehensive services during those years have an enormous impact

on their lifelong learning, their development, and the condi-

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tion of our society. By supporting and investing in high-quality early childhood education, we will reap short- and long-term benefits for our children, our society, and our economic security.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children, the nation's largest association of early childhood professionals working with and on behalf of children from birth through age 8, 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.

NAEYC offers this Call to Action for the 111th Congress and the new Administration to urge a much greater federal commitment to the goal of providing all children with the early development and learning experiences that foster success in school and beyond. This commitment must support families' access to high-quality programs and offer program providers the resources to meet quality standards.

The recommendations in this document are both necessary and achievable. They reflect research and evidence on how best to support children's optimal development and learning. Collectively, NAEYC's recommendations represent essential, interlocking elements of high-quality programs for all children from birth through the early elementary grades. Further, as noted economists point out, additional federal investments will have significant economic returns for children, families, communities, and the nation, reducing the need for more costly interventions later.

Young children and their families must become a federal priority. Implementing these recommendations for congressional and executive action would make a significant difference in the quality of early development and learning, helping children and our society thrive both now and in the future.

Our goal is not to defend the status quo. NAEYC's convictions about early childhood education set forth a vision of a well-financed, high-quality system of early care and education. In this vision of excellence,

All Children have access to safe, accessible, high-quality early childhood education that includes a developmentally appropriate curriculum, knowledgeable and well-trained program staff and educators, and comprehensive services supporting children's health, nutrition, and social well-being in an environment that respects and supports diversity.

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All Early Childhood Professionals are supported by a career ladder, ongoing professional development opportunities, and compensation that attracts and retains high-quality educators.

All Families have access to affordable and high-quality early care and education programs and opportunity to participate in the education and well-being of their children through family involvement in programs and schools.

All Communities and States are accountable for the quality of their early childhood programs and support them through the local, state, federal, and private funding needed to deliver quality programs and services—investments which in turn will reduce the need for remedial and special education and lower teen pregnancy, school dropout rates, and the incidence of juvenile crime.

This vision of excellence is underscored by principles of equity, inclusion, and respect for diversity, so that

- all young children receive high-quality early childhood education, regardless of the setting or auspices of the program;
- high-quality programs are accessible to all families, regardless of income;
- effective early education challenges young children and is appropriate for their ages, individual needs, and cultures; and
- early childhood professionals have excellent preparation, ongoing professional development, and compensation commensurate with their qualifications and experience.



NAEYC's Call to Action for the 111th Congress and new Administration can strengthen the federal partnership with states and communities in making this vision a reality for America's young children and families. With appropriate federal policies and funding, all states and communities can develop a well-financed system of early childhood care and education with strong governance, regulation, and oversight; affordable access for all families; standards for programs, professionals, and children's learning and

development; meaningful evaluation and accountability mechanisms; and additional supports for families and children.

This Call to Action addresses the following six areas, with policy recommendations and identification of legislative and executive vehicles for action:

- **Reap national economic benefits by helping children and families thrive.**
- **Prevent the gap from birth.**
- **Help families afford and programs provide high quality development and learning.**
- **Make every school a ready school.**
- **Build a high-quality early childhood education system.**
- **Attract, educate, and retain a high-quality early childhood workforce.**
- **Expand our knowledge and apply it well.**



Reap National Economic Benefits by Helping Families and Children Thrive

Economists such as Nobel Laureate James Heckman of the University of Chicago and Chairman Ben Bernanke of the Federal Reserve Board believe that public investment in high-quality early childhood education programs is sound economic policy. In the short term, increases for child care would give families access to stable, affordable child care, allowing them to be stable

employees. Increases in Early Head Start and Head Start funds would allow more eligible infants, toddlers, and preschoolers to receive educational and comprehensive services that help them to be ready for school and their families to be more successful in the job market, their communities, and their homes. Investments in the early childhood workforce would reduce job turnover and create a workforce with more education and credentials, which is likely to lead to better earnings over time.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Provide significant funding increases in the Child Care & Development Block Grant, Head Start and Early Head Start, early childhood special education programs, and other early childhood development programs that serve as the foundations of early childhood education services for low-income families and children with special needs.

Vehicles: economic recovery package; remainder of fiscal year 2009 appropriations; fiscal year 2010 budget

Make the Dependent Care Tax Credit refundable so that it can help more low-income families afford care. Expand the sliding scale for determining the amount of the credit, to help middle- and low-income families; index the credit to inflation; and provide a larger credit for families using child care programs that attain national accreditation or a higher level on the state's quality-rating system.

Vehicle: Tax legislation

Prevent the Gap from Birth

Trying to close the achievement gap in preschool is neither a sufficient nor the most effective way to help children do well in school and in life. For many children, poor health and development begin at birth or even at the prenatal stage. Brain research tells us that the most active period of brain development is from birth through age three, and that this lays the critical foundation for further brain development. If we fail to attend to children's physical and emotional health and cognitive development from birth, then we miss an opportunity to make a significant difference. Ultimately, when we try to help children "catch up" at later ages, society pays more in financial and other resources.

Millions of this nation's young children spend many hours a day in programs outside of the home because their parents must work. Some families use child care for children as young as six weeks of age because they do not have paid family leave or cannot afford more unpaid leave. According to the Center for Economic and Policy Research, the United States ranks 20th 21 wealthy nations in length of family leave policy for parents of newborns and last of those nations when it comes to paid leave.

All children deserve a program with high-quality educators, appropriate curriculum and materials, family engagement in their development and learning, and access to health and mental health, nutrition, family support, and other services that make it possible for them to succeed. Too

often, the most difficult care to find is child care for infants and toddlers, children who are not native English speakers, and children with disabilities. These programs are the least affordable for young families and the lowest in quality. We must provide high-quality development and learning experiences for every child, from birth through the early grades.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Expand Early Head Start, the comprehensive, standards-driven program that serves the nation's babies, toddlers, and families living in poverty. National evaluations of Early Head Start demonstrate its success in providing high-quality services and promoting positive development for very young children, and in helping families improve their skills as their children's first teachers and nurturers, particularly in early literacy development and for developing positive relationships. However, current Early Head Start funding levels allow only 3% of the eligible infants and toddlers to benefit from this program. Funding for Early Head Start should increase so that at least four times the number of infants and toddlers can enroll in Early Head Start.

Vehicle: Appropriations

Improve the quality of child care for infants and toddlers by requiring states to use funds to focus on infant and toddler care through grants to high-quality programs serving infants and toddlers, to organizations that operate family child care networks and provide technical assistance to other local providers, and to support statewide networks of specialists to provide training and consultation on high-quality infant and toddler care. Priority for these grants should be focused on low-income communities.

*Vehicle: Reauthorization of the
Child Care & Development
Block Grant*

Expand the Family and Medical Leave Act to allow reasonable paid leave for families with newborn or newly adopted children.

*Vehicle: Amendment to the Family and
Medical Leave Act*

Provide a significant increase in funding for Part C and Section 619 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Vehicle: Appropriations

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Help Families Afford and Programs Provide High Quality Development and Learning

Roughly 12 million children younger than kindergarten age are in some form of child care outside their homes. All children deserve to be in high-quality child care and education settings, yet many families cannot afford them and many programs do not have the resources to provide even minimal quality. Currently, only one in seven eligible children receives assistance from the Child Care & Development Block Grant to help afford them safe, healthy, and high-quality child care while their parents work. The cost of child care is a significant part of a family's budget when parents' earning power is at its lowest. With rising costs of food, utilities, fuel, and other items, the basic necessity of child care is becoming even more difficult for families to access and afford.

For providers, quality cannot be created on the cheap. They must pay salaries that are commensurate with their staff members' qualifications and experience in order to remain competitive. They need to maintain and update facilities and equipment and must meet rising food, utility, and transportation expenses. Yet most states' reimbursement rates for child care do not come close to the cost of high quality.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Double the number of eligible children whom states can assist in receiving child care subsidies. Require states to aggressively conduct outreach to identify and serve eligible children, including children whose families are not native English speakers, children with disabilities, and children in underserved areas.

*Vehicle: Reauthorization of the Child Care &
Development Block Grant*

Improve the child care subsidy system by requiring states to pay at no less than the 75th percentile of a valid and current market rate.

*Vehicle: Reauthorization of the Child Care &
Development Block Grant*

Require each state to develop within five years a statewide quality rating and improvement system that provides resources and technical support to providers to reach higher standards of care and education, improve professional development and compensation, and sustain high quality; to rate programs on different levels of quality of care; and to provide information to parents and the public on choosing, promoting, and supporting high-quality care. Require states to pay a **higher reimbursement for**

each of the higher levels of a state quality rating and improvement system, which should be set at the 75th percentile of a higher base rate.

Vehicle: Reauthorization of the Child Care & Development Block Grant

Make Every School a Ready School

Nearly 30 years ago the President and the nation's governors announced national education goals, with the first goal being readiness of every child for school. The concept of readiness includes much more than children's readiness. As defined by the National Education Goals Panel, the School Readiness Indicators Initiative, and others, readiness includes *ready children, ready families, ready communities, ready early care and education, and ready schools*. All are necessary so that our nation's children will experience success.

Children enter school with different experiences in and outside of the home. Schools must be able to meet the needs of a diverse student body not only in terms of culture, language, and ability but also in terms of previous early learning experiences and children's natural, normal variations at this age.

Ready schools recognize that their mission of academic and social achievement can be realized best when the school administrators and educators understand and use developmentally appropriate curricula, assessments, and teaching practices; involve and engage families; and work cooperatively with the community to ensure that each child's development and learning needs and abilities are fully supported.

The absence of basic health care and economic security places many children at risk for academic failure before they enter school. Families who lack social, emotional, and financial resources and supports are not always able to prepare their children to meet school expectations. Children's cognitive development and readiness for school are intertwined with health care, nutrition, housing, family support services, and the quality of their early childhood program.

A continuum of developmentally appropriate and challenging standards, curriculum, and assessments, as well as comprehensive services and meaningful parent/family

engagement from birth through the early elementary grades, can support better development and learning at each stage, more effective transitions, and consistent shared expectations among settings in which children are served.

Making the necessary changes will require new understanding and resources. In addition to ensuring that administrators and educators of young children have specialized training in child development and early education, class size should be reduced and teacher-student ratios increased to guarantee individualized instruction. Investments in classroom equipment and materials are also needed so that children have access to a wide array of materials and activities for hands-on learning.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Provide joint professional development for teachers of young children in schools, child care programs, state-funded prekindergarten, Early Head Start, and Head Start—particularly those teachers working with children in preschool, kindergarten, and first grade—in all areas of child development (including cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and approaches to learning) and with the knowledge of expectations for children's achievement, state early learning standards, the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework, and state K–3 standards. Attention should be given to appropriate alignment of curriculum, assessment, and classroom practices; effective practices in teaching and supporting children and families of diverse backgrounds and experiences, children with disabilities, and children who are English-language learners; and family engagement in children's development and learning.

Vehicle: Reauthorization of the Elementary & Secondary Education Act/NCLB

Provide professional development for teachers in the early elementary grades, school principals, district superintendents, other district administrators, and central office staff—particularly those with supervisory responsibility for special education, instruction, curriculum, and assessment—to understand children’s development in all domains and developmentally appropriate practices, including appropriate selection and use of curricula, assessments, and teacher-child and peer learning interactions.

Vehicle: Reauthorization of the Elementary & Secondary Education Act/NCLB

Make developmental screening available for every child entering school, to the extent feasible and if he or she has not had a screening in preschool. If such screening identifies a concern, provide appropriate resources for additional assessments, follow-up, referral, and interventions.

Vehicle: Reauthorization of the Elementary & Secondary Education Act/NCLB; Medicaid improvements



Provide teachers and other school personnel with the professional development to foster young children’s positive social and emotional development and to use positive approaches with children with challenging behaviors.

Vehicles: Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act/NCLB; Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

Revise or eliminate the means test for the Child and Adult Care Food Program to serve more children. Provide a third meal for children in care for eight or more

hours and for children in after-school care late in the day. Expand the breakfast-for-all programs to more children in schools.

Vehicle: Reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act

Ensure that children have access to healthy meals and snacks and have daily opportunities for physical activity to prevent obesity and poor nutrition.

Vehicles: Reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act; reauthorization of the Elementary & Secondary Education Act/NCLB

Build a High-Quality Early Childhood Education System

A wide diversity of settings of early childhood education programs serve children from birth through age 8—center-based child care and family child care homes, Head Start and Early Head Start, state-funded prekindergarten, and schools, as well as home visitation, parent education, and other family support services. Programs operate under a variety of agencies and auspices and rely on different funding and governance systems, different mechanisms for delivery, and different preparation and ongoing professional development requirements and opportunities for staff. Fragmentation and the lack of adequate resources must be addressed by creating a *system* in every state and community.

By *system*, NAEYC means all of the elements that support the provision of high-quality early childhood education for all children: program delivery, education and professional development for all staff, program licensing and accreditation, resource and referral for families, adequate and equitable compensation, appropriate and safe facilities, governance for planning and implementation mechanisms, family engagement and education, and access to supports for children and families’ physical and mental health needs and economic stability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Create a program of birth-to-age 5 incentive grants to states, coordinated with state early learning advisory councils and state early childhood public/private partnerships, to help develop and implement cross-sector plans for high-quality birth-to-5 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 with disabilities and on improving the quality of child care, Early Head Start, Head Start, and state prekindergarten programs.

Vehicles: Stand-alone legislation; reauthorization of the Child Care & Development Block Grant

Require states to implement a quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) that has several levels or tiers for rating the quality of programs, starting with licensing standards and leading to nationally recognized program quality standards. Provide **grants to programs to help them improve their quality so that they can reach and maintain higher levels on the QRIS**, including assistance for training and education, facilities and equipment, and compensation increases.

Vehicle: Reauthorization of the Child Care & Development Block Grant

Many Early Head Start, Head Start, and state prekindergarten programs do not cover the full working day. **The state Child Care Development Fund plan should describe how it will link child care to Early Head Start, Head Start, and state prekindergarten programs** that do not provide for a full work day or work year, so those programs can better meet the needs of children of working families.

Vehicle: Reauthorization of the Child Care & Development Block Grant

Fund the state early learning advisory councils, required in the 2007 Head Start reauthorization, to undertake the coordination and activities set forth in the legislation.

Vehicle: Appropriations

Reinstate the Child Care Bureau on an equal footing with Head Start within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The previous Administration demoted the Child Care Bureau and reduced its staffing. Given the enormity of the need for affordable, quality child care and the importance of the Bureau in helping states and others with technical assistance, dissemination of information, and coordination with other federal agencies and programs, the office that oversees child care should be elevated rather than maintained in a demoted position.

Vehicles: Appropriations; Executive action

Establish an Interagency Coordination Workgroup that would lead to the development of a National Council on Early Childhood Development and Learning, which includes, at a minimum, the federal departments of Health and Human Services, Education, Labor, and Agriculture, to enhance coordination among the diverse array of programs as well as the research and data collection across agencies relating to young children.

Vehicle: Executive action

Attract, Educate, and Retain a High-Quality Early Childhood Workforce

Research tells us that qualified and well-compensated professionals are essential to high-quality early childhood education programs. To ensure high quality, early childhood educators must be knowledgeable and highly skilled and children should have consistency of program staff over time. Inadequate compensation makes it difficult to attract well-educated individuals to the field, resulting in an annual teacher turnover rate estimated to be at least 30%—a rate far exceeding many other sectors of the economy.

The Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 provides several new opportunities for improving the quality and retention of early childhood educators. Title II Teacher Quality Partnerships may include early childhood education programs as part of its efforts to improve teacher preparation, provide mentoring for early childhood educators, and improve compensation for and retention of early childhood educators who earn postsecondary degrees. Title VIII Part I is a new program that provides grants to states to create cross-sector, comprehensive professional development systems to improve preparation programs, develop career pathways, create articulation of degrees and credentials, increase compensation, and improve financial assistance so that states have a greater and more stable number of good early childhood educators in all settings serving young children.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Expand funding for the Title II Teacher Quality Partnerships in the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) and fund the Title VIII program of grants to states to establish comprehensive, cross-sector professional development systems for early childhood educators (Title VIII Part I of HEOA).

Vehicle: Appropriations

Require states to develop a statewide quality rating and improvement system and require that QRIS systems dedicate resources to increase compensation for early childhood educators.

Vehicle: Reauthorization of the Child Care & Development Block Grant

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Vehicles: Reauthorization of the Child Care & Development Block Grant; reauthorization of the Institute of Education Sciences; Executive action

Maintain and provide appropriate funding to continue the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS-B and ECLS-K) that provides policy makers, researchers, child care providers, teachers, administrators, and families with information about children’s early life experiences, including health, development, care, and education areas.

Vehicle: Reauthorization of the Institute for Education Sciences

Conduct a study of the early care and education workforce using state-by-state data on workforce demographics, credentials and education, length of time in a program, and compensation by program setting (family child care, center child care, Head Start, school, or relative).

Vehicles: Reauthorization of the Child Care & Development Block Grant

Expand Our Knowledge and Apply It Well

Research gives early childhood practitioners and policy makers essential knowledge to use in making decisions on behalf of young children and families. Several research, data, and dissemination points across federal agencies should be better coordinated to help practitioners and the public have access to credible and useful information to improve professional practice and policies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Maintain a distinct research center on early childhood education and include early childhood issues addressed by other topical research centers focusing on teacher quality and student achievement.

Vehicle: Reauthorization of the Institute for Education Sciences

Make research, data, and dissemination on young children’s development and education a component of a National Council on Early Childhood Development and Learning. The council would coordinate a variety of efforts to identify gaps and strengthen young children’s health, development, and learning.

Fund the National Academy of Sciences to conduct a study and report to Congress on the actual cost of a high-quality early childhood education program, gathering information on the cost per child and age of the children from birth to age 13, and taking into account whether the program is center-based, school-based, or family child care. The study should examine at a minimum whether the program provides full-year and/or full-day care and meets high-quality program standards, as well as the credentials and compensation of program staff. The study should include attention to the costs of high-quality care for infants and toddlers and children with special needs.

Vehicle: Reauthorization of the Child Care & Development Block Grant

Require school districts to report to the state and to the U.S. Secretary of Education **what percentage of Title I funds are spent on children, by age group, below kindergarten and whether the funds are coordinated with other public or private funding to provide programs serving children younger than kindergarten age.** The report should include how such funds expand enrollment for preschool children, create full-day programs, and provide comprehensive services, and it should examine demographic information on the children served with those funds.

Vehicle: Reauthorization of the Elementary & Secondary Education Act/NCLB

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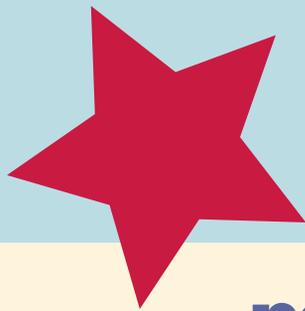
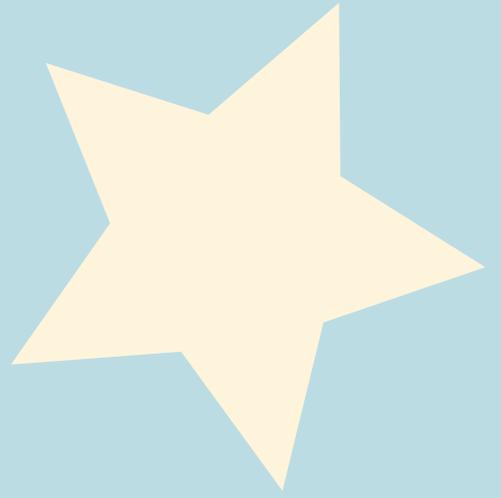
Efforts to raise national awareness of the importance of high-quality development and learning experiences for all young children, beginning at birth and continuing through the early grades, have taken hold. Our policies and investments, however, have not sufficiently changed to ensure that all young children in all early childhood program settings are receiving the affordable, high-quality development and learning experiences they need and deserve. This Call to Action provides a set of recommendations for Congress and the Administration that are appropriate for federal engagement in this realm and that help states, communities, and programs reach a vision for excellence and equity for *all* young children.

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