



**Remarks by Kathy Patterson**  
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New America Foundation Discussion on “No Child Left Behind and Early Education: Prospects for 2008”  
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On behalf of Pre-K Now, I am grateful to Sara Mead and the New America Foundation for the “new ideas” paper, and for the opportunity to meet today to discuss where we are in federal education legislation. I am honored to be in the company of this panel and want to give a special thanks to the Education Trust, and Amy individually, for their strong leadership on No Child Left Behind, and continuing emphasis on quality education for the most vulnerable kids.

In her testimony before the NCLB commission last year Libby Doggett emphasized the importance of embracing pre-kindergarten in this country’s most important education law. Preparing **all** children for success in school has to be the first step in reforming public education.

I’m going to talk about several of the specific proposals included in the paper, including a few that I would argue are not, precisely, “new” ideas, because they were included in Pre-K Now’s earlier advocacy on reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. And then I want to take exception to the paper as a whole, which I will explain!

The first recommendation, on Reading First funding, is one we agree with so long as the early literacy curricula are developmentally appropriate. Many in early education get nervous when early education and NCLB are mentioned in the same sentence, and I appreciate the sensitivity Sara’s paper demonstrates on that point.

We were particularly pleased to see Recommendations Two and Four – to provide high-quality pre-k to children who live near low-performing schools, and to restructure elementary schools identified for reconstitution as pre-k-through-third-grade Early Education Academies.

Those two recommendations are both more specific, and therefore probably more useful, than the broader recommendation that we included in our NCLB advocacy earlier this year. We recommended that “the accountability provisions of Section 1116 of NCLB be amended to permit schools, LEAs, and states to initiate or expand high-quality pre-k as a federally-supported instructional strategy when schools do not meet NCLB progress goals.” And we recommended including pre-k “as an intervention in the school improvement, corrective action, and whole school reform sections of Title I.”

Because NCLB was based on research – on using what we know – it only makes sense for the law’s accountability structure to reflect what we know about high-quality early education and the long-term benefits to children and to the community as a whole. We acknowledged, as Sara’s paper acknowledges, that pre-k as an intervention requires time, more time than NCLB today provides to demonstrate improvement.

It is also the case that high-quality pre-k followed by poor quality K-12 schooling can contribute to a “fade-out” effect on the gains children make, which Sara acknowledged in her essay in the new issue of *The American Prospect*. Encouraging school systems to create high-quality pre-k-through-third-grade academies could help drive higher-quality early elementary education overall and is a valuable contribution.

We concur with Recommendation Two, to permit Title I funds for high-quality pre-k for three and four year olds whose neighborhood schools are in need of improvement, and, further, had advocated raising the Title I allocations from 20 percent to 30 percent.

We have also advocated including pre-k information in the data systems, and appreciate the greater specificity that you have provided here – that is, not just numbers but more of the qualitative information on curriculum and any screening undertaken by local education agencies so that future improvements can be based on data to date. We have recommended a specific reference to children in military families as part of data gathering because of the added challenges they face.

We also believe the highly qualified teacher language should apply to pre-k teachers and have been reviewing every early education bill introduced to see whether references to “K-12” should be altered to embrace pre-k. We concur with Recommendation Seven – to require pre-k programs operated with Title I funds to employ “highly qualified early educators” as lead teachers. We had hoped that the House and Senate reauthorization of NCLB would encompass the Hirono and Clinton-Bond bills in part because we want to see pre-k embraced as a standard part of public education – to be encompassed just as, a century ago, high school became an accepted part of the public education spectrum.

We believe pre-k teachers should be included in the “highly qualified teacher” requirements, with a bachelor’s degree requirement effective with the 2013-14 school year, consistent with the language in the *Head Start* reauthorization. We have strongly advocated use of a bachelor’s degree requirement as an important measurement of quality, based on research that the most effective pre-k teachers have their degrees as well as additional specialized training in early childhood education.

That said, we welcome the recommendation that work commence at the national level to develop an alternative standard and appreciate the reference to “validly-observed teacher interactions” as a part of such a standard. We find in our work with states that the bachelor’s degree requirement for pre-k teachers is troubling for some policymakers and threatening to some providers of early care. An alternative standard would be particularly useful as an interim measure, while we move toward an early education workforce where the bachelor’s degree and ongoing professional development are the norm in every classroom.

For the same reasons we concur with Recommendation Eight, to “create a ‘pathways to pre-kindergarten teaching’ alternative certification demonstration program.” A prospective alternative standard and alternative pathways for current early education providers would help address what Katherine Bradley of CityBridge describes as the “morning after” question. When a state or the District of Columbia enacts legislation to offer quality pre-k to all children, what do we do the next day to assure that the workforce will be there – on hand and prepared for all those smiling new faces at the door? We need to stretch our imaginations, our schools of education, and our capacities at long-distance learning to meet the professional workforce need that we are seeking to create with voluntary pre-k for all of our three and four year olds.

It’s important to be clear that “alternative” does *not* mean, “not rigorous.”

While work on NCLB has apparently slowed if not stopped, we applaud the progress made to date on the Higher Education Act. House Education and Labor and the full Senate have approved changes that will support professional development for pre-k teachers, and we agree with the thrust of the New America recommendations that the better funded provisions of ESEA also support pre-k teacher development.

We applaud your Recommendation Ten. We have worked closely with the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies on a Spanish-language public service announcement designed to expand access and use of pre-k. In addition to reporting requirements to encourage states to enroll Latino children, we also recommend language in Title II to support professional development aimed at teachers of English language learners.

We concur with the recommendation to improve support for charter schools that seek to offer high-quality pre-k. Again, I am grateful for the specific recommendations contained here, and look forward to working with you, and with our colleagues on Capitol Hill, to see these recommendations incorporated in committee legislation.

Where I want to take exception with this paper and the constructive ideas for reauthorization is on this point: We have a responsibility as advocates for children and for sound education policy to be bold. I know it was not your intent to be timid. We have to stop working solely at the margins and go for the gold, and I mean that literally. We need a sizeable and significant federal financial presence in early education to prepare our youngest learners for success in school and life. I think we all know this and should be willing to say so.

That bold agenda includes moving crisply forward on the pre-kindergarten legislation that is before the Congress. The Clinton-Bond and Casey bills in the Senate and the Hirono and Maloney bills in the House differ in some respects but are consistent in providing the kind of incentive grants for state pre-k programs that we – and the New American Foundation – have been talking about for some time now.

With NCLB slowed by the far more controversial aspects of testing and workforce performance, we should look to the Education and Labor and HELP Committees to move forward with the pre-k legislation that we had hoped, until a month or so ago, would be part of NCLB. After all, as the *Washington Post* said earlier this week, federal support for pre-kindergarten is a “safe topic.” I hope members of Congress and their staffs saw that, so they know it’s smooth sailing to move forward with pre-k bills!

And not only would enacting the legislation be good public policy. It would also be good politics, especially for a Congress that has yet to complete work on 12 of the 13 appropriations bills for the federal fiscal year that began 60 days ago. I mention this because I believe that members of Congress are at risk of being held in ever lower regard. A new bill that would permit federal lawmakers to join the 30 governors and bipartisan majorities in state legislatures in supporting pre-k is just too good a political option to pass up.

A second phase of a bold early education agenda would be addressing the funding inequities that we also all know exist. As advocates for children we need to develop a strong consensus for federal support for the programs that matter most and move away from perennially battling among friends: *Head Start* versus child care versus Title I in every appropriation cycle. There are discussions out there that lead me to be optimistic about a new “coming together” for children’s organizations at the national level, and working toward a stronger federal investment in children is at the top of the agenda. We know from the work Julia Isaacs and Gene Steuerle at the Urban Institute have done that federal investments in children will decline over the next decade, absent a change in direction. And

while we have celebrated the reauthorization of *Head Start*, we all also know that the dollars haven't been there, year after year, to meet the need – the same with Title I and certainly the same with regard to child care.

There are going to be two significant opportunities in the next few years for children's advocates to secure greater federal investments in pre-kindergarten, in home visiting, in good quality child care. And it is important that when the moment arrives, those voices for kids be loud and coordinated and effective. In 2010, the Bush-era tax cuts will be up for reauthorization, and it's important that we make the case for investing in children with some of those revenues. Similarly, at some point in time we will stop spending at current levels for the war, and, again, it's critical that advocates for investing in children be at the head of the line.

I'd challenge all of us as advocates for pre-k and for children more generally to think and talk big – because if we don't, who else will? Thank you, again, and I look forward to questions.