



June 20, 2007

The Hon. Edward M. Kennedy
Chairman, HELP Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Kennedy:

Thank you for your longstanding leadership to improve public education for America's children, and your proven commitment to our very youngest learners. We write to share our recommendations for the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act/No Child Left Behind, with particular emphasis on federal support for pre-kindergarten. As you know well, school readiness begins *before* kindergarten, and new incentives to states can help prepare our children for success in school.

We are pleased to acknowledge that organizations including the National Governors Association, Council of Chief State School Officers, Council of the Great City Schools, and American Federation of Teachers are on record supporting greater emphasis on proven, research-based instructional strategies within the NCLB accountability framework. Our recommendations are similarly grounded in NCLB's twin themes of research-based policy and accountability.

In brief, we urge you and the Committee on Education and Labor to:

- Create a new federal incentive grant to support and improve the quality of state pre-k programs.
- Include high-quality pre-k programs as an allowable instructional intervention available to states and local education agencies in Title I.
- Modify Title II provisions to encompass pre-k teachers in academic training and professional development.

As we noted in testimony before the NCLB Commission last summer, the law "has done much at the elementary and middle school level to focus attention on the achievement gap. But the gap actually begins in early childhood, as a readiness gap." To address that readiness gap, states have made huge investments in pre-k in recent years – a 45 percent increase in state investments in the last two years alone. With federal support, we can do even more.

A new federal incentive grant

Federal grants to states to create or improve their pre-k programs would move our nation closer to the vision of quality, voluntary pre-k for all three- and four-year-old children. Citing the research that high-quality pre-k provides a substantial return on every dollar invested, analysts at the Brookings Institution and organizations including the National School Boards Association, Education Sector, and New America Foundation have joined Pre-K Now in recommending new federal investments in pre-k. The Council of the Great City Schools, a key supporter of No Child Left Behind, suggests authorizing "a new federal program for pre-kindergarten."

We urge you to authorize \$1 billion for a new incentive grant program to encourage state initiatives to expand the capacity and improve the quality of publicly-funded pre-k.

Pre-k as an instructional intervention

The text of No Child Left Behind is threaded with references to scientifically-based interventions to improve academic achievement. As mentioned above, research published over the last 30 years underscores the value of early childhood education. Poor academic achievement is foreshadowed by low cognitive, linguistic, and social functioning in the years prior to kindergarten. The National Association of Elementary School Principals has noted that nearly every educational benchmark - from working at grade level to staying in school - is related to school readiness.

For these reasons we recommend 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. We support the recommendation of the Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS) that schools identified for intervention and improvement spend an amount equal to 30 percent of Title I funds for proven interventions including early childhood education.

Because research-based interventions such as high-quality pre-k take time to see results in the academic success of children, we endorse the concept of a revised school intervention and improvement timeframe as recommended by the CGCS. We would be happy to work with you on alternatives that provide school districts and states with sufficient time to see the benefits of early learning and build on the diverse delivery systems and collaboration already under way. We are happy to provide specific legislative language to incorporate pre-k as an intervention in the school improvement, corrective action, and whole school reform sections of Title I.

Pre-k teacher quality

We recommend that pre-k teachers be included in the “highly qualified teacher” requirements of Section 1119 and 9101(23) consistent with research that the most effective pre-k teachers have earned bachelor's degrees and have additional, specialized training in early-childhood education. We recommend this be effective for the 2013-2014 school year, consistent with the degree requirements included in the Head Start reauthorization now before the Congress.

Title II authorizes funds to recruit and train K-12 teachers, and we recommend the provisions be broadened to include pre-k teachers. We recommend that funds also be permitted to enable principals to gain the knowledge of early childhood development they need to lead high-quality pre-k programs. We recommend that the Troops to Teachers and Transition to Teaching programs be broadened to include pre-k instruction.

We endorse the specific legislative language for Title II prepared by the National Association for the Education of Young Children to further the goals of high-quality early childhood education. We concur with the recommendation by the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) that Title II include language to permit professional development specifically to assist teachers of English language learners.

Additional recommendations

We endorse the Title I reporting requirements of CLASP that LEAs report the number of pre-k children served by age, a description of services provided, and total expenditures for the age group. We also join CLASP in advocating that state education agencies be permitted to use federal funds to support LEA planning for the use of Title I funds for early childhood education.

We recommend the following amendments to Title V:

- Update the funding formulas used to determine grants to states for innovative programs to include children ages three and four in the state (Section 5145).
- Direct that the Fund for the Improvement of Education be used to establish P-16 (pre-k through college) longitudinal studies to measure the long-term impact of pre-k (while maintaining the anonymity of individual participants in the study).
- Broaden eligibility for the Foreign Language Assistance Program and for physical education grants to cover pre-k programs (Sections 5492 and 5503 respectively).

We look forward to working with you, your colleagues, and our partners in the education and early childhood advocacy communities to produce a stronger Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and to build into the law a significant federal investment in high-quality pre-k. We are available to you and your staff as you move legislation forward. Please contact us or federal fellow Matthew Smith (msmith@preknow.org) if we can provide any additional information on the important work of assuring that all of our children are able to enter kindergarten ready to succeed.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,



Libby Doggett, Ph.D.
Executive Director



Kathy Patterson
Federal Policy Director

cc: Members, HELP Committee