



FIRST FOCUS CAMPAIGN FOR CHILDREN STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

HOUSE EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE COMMITTEE: “THE FOUNDATION FOR SUCCESS: DISCUSSING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE IN AMERICA”

February 5, 2014

Chairman Kline, Ranking Member Miller, and Members of the House Education and the Workforce Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement on early childhood education and care in the United States.

First Focus Campaign for Children is a bipartisan children’s advocacy organization dedicated to making children and families a priority in federal policy and budget decisions. Our organization is committed to ensuring that all of our nation’s children have equal opportunity to reach their full potential, and we know that high quality early childhood education and care are essential for children’s ability to fulfill their potential later in life.

Yet too many young children in America today can’t access high quality early education and care. Despite the volumes of research that show the long term positive impact of early education, the high cost of private preschool and the limited availability of existing publicly funded early education initiatives means that many children are left out. Many states and localities have increased investment in early childhood education, but with a slow economic recovery relying on state and local funds is not sufficient to ensure high quality and broad access. As you know, state and local governments are largely responsible for funding their own public education systems with limited federal support. In early childhood, the federal government provides significant funding for early childhood education and care in states; we must do more to ensure that states and the federal government work in partnership so that every child has access to high-quality early education.

Early Childhood Education Critical for Later Success in School and Life

The importance of early childhood education has been studied extensively, perhaps more than most policy issues. This research is multi-disciplinary, including brain development science, longitudinal educational and health studies, and other social science research. Moreover, the research is unequivocal – the earliest years of life are a critical period in human development and they matter greatly for success in school and life.

Research on brain development reveals that early brain development from prenatal through age 8 is critical period for the development of neural pathways that establish the foundations for critical language, cognitive and social-

emotional development, including important skill such as controlling impulses, attention and memory. In fact, a child's first three years represent a time rapid and intense brain development whereby access to safe, nurturing, and enriching experiences and interactions with caring adults can literally affect the brain architecture.

Conversely, children who are denied these opportunities begin to lag behind in their development, and gaps in skills and knowledge that impact school readiness and subsequent academic success begin to appear. For instance, gaps in language skills between poor children and their more affluent peers can begin to emerge as early as 18 months.¹ The research shows that children who start behind tend to stay behind.

Adverse experiences before birth and in the early years can also negatively impact health throughout a child's life.² These experiences influence children's physiological responses, such as the immune system, overall health, and brain architecture through childhood and into adulthood.³ Environmental factors normally associated with low-income families, such as lack of adequate heating and nutrition and lack of stable and responsive relationships, are associated with a higher incidence of cardiovascular, respiratory and psychiatric diseases in adulthood. Even living in poverty for a short time has negative implications for brain development and health outcomes later in life. Self-reported health status of adults who fell into poverty as children is the same as or worse than that of adults who lived in chronic poverty as children, and both are considerably worse than for adults who never experienced poverty as a child.⁴

High-quality early learning and development programs have a significant impact on children's development and later life outcomes. Various studies reveal that high-quality early childhood education and care programs help mitigate the negative effects of living the early years in poverty and helps prevent the gap that begins before children enter kindergarten. As a result, these programs have a major positive impact on children's readiness for school and long-term outcomes such as high school graduation, likelihood of attending college, and earnings as an adult. For example, evidence based home visiting gives parents the parenting education and skills necessary to have engaging, warm relationships with their children. Preschool programs that focus on child development and emphasize positive child-teacher interactions also help children develop the trusting relationships that are necessary for healthy brain development. Of equal importance for children living in poverty are the wraparound services that many high-quality preschools offer, such as meal programs and parent education and family support, such as adult education and job training.

Indeed, longitudinal studies reveal that children who attend high-quality preschool initiatives have positive long-term outcomes. For example, a 2009 study of individuals who participated in Head Start between 1984 and 1990 finds that children who attend Head Start are about 8.5 percent more likely to graduate from high school, 6 percent more likely to attempt at least one year of college, about 6 percent less likely to be diagnosed with a learning disability, and 7 percent less likely to repeat a grade, be idle after high school graduation, or be in poor health as adults.⁵ These long-term positive effects are in addition to shorter term increases in test scores, and the long-term effects last even after the test scores of children who did not participate in Head Start catch up to the scores of Head Start participants. This should be unsurprising for two reasons, (a) standardized tests often do not adequately

measure the cognitive and social-emotional gains made by children in Head Start; and (b) many schools are struggling to adapt kindergarten through third grade instruction to effectively build on the strengths of students who received high-quality early childhood education.⁶

There is an abundance of additional research with similar conclusions, but this testimony is not the place to cite reams of academic studies. Fortunately, a 2010 peer reviewed meta-analysis of this body of research provides a summary of and conclusions from research in this field. The authors analyzed 123 comparative studies of early childhood, including quasi-experimental and randomized studies, and found that “significant effects were found in this study for children who attend a preschool program prior to entering kindergarten. Although the largest effect sizes were observed for cognitive outcomes, a preschool education was also found to impact children’s social skills and school progress.”⁷ The research on preschool reveals numerous positive outcomes for children, including cognition and social-emotions development.

Despite the significant research on the importance of early childhood experiences in the earliest years of life, in most states no child has the right to public education before the age of six.

Early Education and Care is in High Demand but Unavailable for Many Families

Given the overwhelming evidence of the positive results of attending high-quality preschool programs it is not surprising that early childhood education and care is in high demand. Families that can afford it routinely pay prices near or above the cost of a public college or university for their young children to be enrolled in a high-quality program.⁸

With high demand and high cost, a majority of 4-year-olds from the top two income quintiles (income of around \$62,000 to \$101,000 and \$101,000 and above, respectively) attend some kind of pre-K program. Ninety percent of 4-year-olds from the top quintile and 85 percent of 4-year-olds from the second highest quintile attend pre-K, and most of those children attend private pre-K programs (60 percent of children from the highest quintile and 42 percent from the second highest).⁹

Meanwhile, comparing the average cost of private pre-K to average expenditures for low-income and middle-class families from the first three income quintiles reveals that private pre-K would be the largest or second largest cost for a family.¹⁰ Due to this high cost, far fewer children from the middle- and lower-income quintiles attend pre-K as 4-year-olds. Generous estimates put enrollment rates for the lowest quintiles around 60 percent, with a majority of children enrolled in publicly funded pre-K or Head Start. In the lowest income quintile, 48 percent of 4-year-olds are enrolled in publicly funded pre-K or Head Start, compared to 7 percent of children enrolled in privately funded pre-K. Similarly, in the middle quintile 48 percent of children are enrolled in publicly funded pre-K while only 21 percent are enrolled in private pre-K.¹¹

Though children from families in the lower and middle income quintiles are enrolled in publicly funded pre-K at a higher rate than their wealthier peers, enrollment rates in pre-K are still significantly lower for children from low- and middle-class families. This is because the high cost of private preschool is unaffordable for many families, as stated above, and the supply of affordable publicly funded preschool is limited. For example, Head Start, the largest federal investment in early education for pre-K age children, enrolls only 42 percent of eligible children. Even worse, only 4 percent of eligible children participate in Early Head Start, an early education program for children from birth through age 3.¹² Additionally, while funding and enrollment rates in state-funded pre-K vary by state, the overall trend has been decreased funding for the past three years, resulting in static enrollment rates between the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 school years and a failure to increase quality significantly.¹³ Though states are beginning to reinvest in their state-funded pre-K programs,¹⁴ depending only on state funds means progress will be piecemeal by state, making children's success contingent on in which state that child is born. Finally, the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program is due to expire at the end of this year, threatening to take away a successful and popular program that improves health and developmental outcomes for children.

The federal budget reveals why so many families are unable to access publicly funded preschool: we are grossly underinvesting in children and young children in particular. In 2013, only 7.82 percent of the federal budget was spent on programs for children, reflecting a trend of declining investments in children since 2010; total federal spending on children in the last three years decreased 16 percent, with the children's share of the federal budget decreasing nearly 8 percent in the same time period.¹⁵ Additionally, spending on children is projected to fall to 1.8 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) by 2023, compared to projected increases in spending on Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security serving the elderly and disabled from 9 percent of GDP in 2012 to 10.4 percent by 2023. In fact, even growth in spending on interest on the national debt is projected to outpace federal investments in children by 2017 and increase after that.¹⁶ To put federal spending on children in perspective, federal spending per person on seniors is seven times greater than spending on children (\$25,455 per senior compared to \$3,822 per child), and total state and federal spending on seniors is more than twice what is spent on children (\$26,356 per senior compared to \$11,822 per child).¹⁷

More specific to early childhood education and care, federal spending on all early childhood programs is only \$0.8 billion higher than it was in 2008, not adjusted for inflation. After a significant increase in overall spending due to the American Recovery Reinvestment Act in 2009, federal spending in 2013 was \$21.5 billion, compared to \$20.7 billion in 2008.¹⁸

The negative outcomes of not investing in children early are twofold. Children across the country are missing the opportunity to participate in high-quality early education programs and missing the multiple positive outcomes of those programs. This is bad for the children who missed the chance to benefit from high-quality early education and for the country that wants an educated, productive workforce after these children grow up. Second, the

government is paying for the failure to fund early childhood education and care in the long term. The return on investment in preschool is between \$7 and \$11 for every \$1 invested, meaning that for every \$1 invested in high-quality early education and care, the government receives increased tax revenue due to increased earnings of participants in early education programs while saving on the cost of grade repetition, special education placements, and negative health outcomes to save and earn between \$7 and \$11.¹⁹ In fact, if every state implemented and funded high-quality pre-K for all children under 200 percent of the federal poverty level, it would produce enough savings in decreased grade retention alone, only one of many cost savings associated with pre-K, that only Idaho would have a net positive budgetary impact by 2030. The other 49 states would see significant savings. For example, Minnesota would save nearly \$600 million by 2030, and California would save over \$1 billion.²⁰ And these savings are underestimates based on a conservative estimate of cost savings from decreased grade retention only. When the other positive effects of pre-K, such as decreased special education placements and the various others discussed above are taken into account the cost savings or return on investment would be even greater.

Invest in What Works

Instead of having millions of children miss the opportunity of high-quality early childhood education and care and having to pay for this missed opportunity in the long term, the federal government should build on what has worked in the past and greatly expand access to high-quality early childhood experiences.

Congress should reauthorize and expand MIECHV. The most important people in a young child's life are her parents. Families have the best opportunity to positively influence their child's development, so it is important to ensure that parents have the knowledge and training they need to be the best parents for their children to reduce exposure to adverse experiences. MIECHV is an evidence-based program that produces positive outcomes for children by helping parents learn good parenting strategies to alleviate many of the conditions that lead to adverse experiences in early childhood. MIECHV is an excellent example of a bipartisan initiative that improves outcomes for young, at-risk children, but funding expires at the end of fiscal year 2014. Congress should act now to extend this funding and expand this successful initiative. States have worked to create the infrastructure necessary to reach the highest priority children and families, but there is still much work to be done. The number and percentage of eligible children and families who are served will grow as states continue to build the infrastructure necessary to reach all eligible children, but this will happen only if funding is extended. Even a temporary lapse in funding could threaten the progress already made, so Congress should extend and expand funding before it expires at the end of this year.

In addition to reauthorizing and expanding MIECHV, Congress should work to improve health outcomes for children in the early years. The last decade has seen tremendous gains in children's health insurance coverage. There needs to be a greater emphasis on leveraging the health care system to support children's healthy

development. One such strategy would be ensuring that health care providers expand developmental screenings for young children to help catch any irregularities early, when it is more effective and less costly to treat.

The FY2014 omnibus appropriations bill that was recently passed and signed into law includes additional funding creating Early Head Start-Child Care partnerships. This is a great step toward improving the quality of childcare and ensuring that more infants and toddlers are in programs that support their development and learning. Congress should continue funding this initiative and work with the Department of Health and Human Services to ensure successful implementation.

To make a major impact on early childhood education and care in this country, Congress should pass the Strong Start for America's Children Act (H.R.3461). This bipartisan bill will expand access to high-quality pre-K for 4-year-olds across the country using state-federal partnerships, an approach that is modeled after the Children's Health Insurance Program. The Strong Start Act provides resources for states to adequately fund pre-K programs, leveraging federal resources during the most costly years of ramp up and expansion while retaining states flexibility to design how the programs will work in their states. Though states and localities are expanding access to state- or local-funded pre-K, many states are faced with limited funding and therefore cannot expand to reach all children who would benefit. To ensure that states don't have to go it alone, Congress should pass the Strong Start Act and provide additional federal funding to give states a boost and ensure that every child can access high-quality pre-K.

Congress should ensure that there is continuity throughout the many transitions in early childhood and that programs and services are anchored in developmental science. The Continuum of Learning Act (H.R.791) includes provisions that work to ensure that children's cognitive, social, emotional, linguistic, and physical development are attended to along a continuum of learning throughout the transitions that occur in a child's earliest years - from infant and toddler to preschoolers, through kindergarten age and to 3rd grade. In particular, the bill addresses the critical issue of sustaining the effects of high-quality early childhood services in the years before school. Instruction in the early primary grades (kindergarten through third grade) must be developmentally informed, continuing to focus on social and emotional development and approaches to learning, going beyond reading and math. The Continuum of Education Act addresses this issue by encouraging coordination between early childhood programs and local school districts to establish a continuum of curricula and academic and developmental expectations through the transition to elementary school, to offer joint professional development for teachers in the early grades, and encourage teachers to get a specialized early education credential.

Finally, Congress should encourage all states to offer full-day kindergarten. Currently, only 11 states and the District of Columbia require school districts to offer full-day kindergarten at no additional cost to families. There is limited data on the availability of full-day kindergarten; the federal government is not collecting data on access to kindergarten at the district level or on funding parity with other grades. Kindergarten is an essential step on the ladder of early childhood education, bridging the gap between preschool and the early elementary grades.

Moreover, many states have raised the bar in terms of standards beginning in kindergarten. It's unthinkable to expect that children can meet these expectations in a 2 ½ hour school day. Congress should start by collecting district-level data on the availability of full-day kindergarten at no cost to families and the cost per child for kindergarten. Additionally, Congress should work to ensure that more children have access to full-day kindergarten by encouraging states to require school districts to offer full-day kindergarten at no additional cost.

Conclusion

Too many young children today are missing out on high quality early learning. The positive gains from these experiences are well documented and the families that can afford to send their children to preschool often do. But the limited supply of publicly funded, affordable preschool means that children from low- and middle-income families often do not attend these programs. These children miss out on the positive effects of high-quality early childhood education and the country misses the opportunity to ensure that children are given every opportunity to reach their full potential.

Fortunately, thanks to existing local, state, and federal initiatives and extensive research, we know how to provide effective early learning. Congress should pass legislation based on this knowledge and expand early learning opportunities for families and children across the country.

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² Jack Shonkoff and Deborah Phillips, eds. (2000), *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The science of early childhood development*, Board on Children, Youth, and Families, National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, National Academies of Science. Washington, DC: National Academy Press. Available: http://www.nap.edu/openbook.php?record_id=9824

³ Center on the Developing Child (2010) *The Foundations of Lifelong Health Are Built in Early Childhood*. Available: http://developingchild.harvard.edu/index.php/resources/reports_and_working_papers/foundations-of-lifelong-health/

⁴ First Focus (2009), *Turning Point: The long term effects of recession-induced child poverty*, available: <http://www.firstfocus.net/library/reports/turning-point-long-term-effects-recession-induced-child-poverty>

⁵ David Deming (2009), *Early Childhood Intervention and Life-Cycle Skill Development: Evidence from Head Start*. American Economic Journal: Applied Economics 1:3, 111-134. Available: http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~deming/papers/Deming_HeadStart.pdf

⁶ Carolyn Hill, William Gormley, Jr., Shirley Adelstein, and Catherine Willemin (2010), *The Effects of Oklahoma's Pre-Kindergarten Program on 3rd Grade Test Scores*. Center for Research on Children in the U.S., Georgetown University. Available: http://www.crocus.georgetown.edu/reports/3rdGradeOutcomes_brief.pdf

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⁸ Gault, Barbara, Anne Mitchell, and Erica Williams (2008). Meaningful Investments in Pre-K: Estimating the per-child costs of quality programs. Institute for Women's Policy, Washington, D.C. The actual cost of high quality pre-K in the private sector varies greatly by state, this is only the national estimate of the average cost of pre-K in the private sector and Wat, A. (2008). *The pre-K pinch: Early education and the middle class*. Pre-K Now, available: http://www.pewtrusts.org/uploadedFiles/wwwpewtrustsorg/Reports/Pre-K_education/pre-Kpinch_Nov2008_report.pdf

⁹ W. Steven Barnett and M. Nores (2012). *Estimated Participation and Hours in Early Care and Education by Type of Arrangement and Income at Ages 2 to 4 in 2010*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER).

¹⁰ Kevin Lindsey (2013), *Pre-K for Every Child: A matter of fairness*. First Focus, available: <http://firstfocus.net/library/reports/pre-k-for-every-child-a-matter-of-fairness>.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Julie Blair (2013), *Only 42 Percent of Eligible Children Participate in Head Start*. Education Week, November 25, 2013. Available: http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/early_years/2013/11/only_42_percent_of_eligible_children_participate_in_head_start.html

¹³ W. Steven Barnett, M.E. Carolan, J. Fitzgerald, and J.H. Squires (2012). *The State of Preschool 2012: State preschool yearbook*. National Institute for Early Education Research and Rutgers Graduate School of Education. Available: <http://nieer.org/sites/nieer/files/yearbook2012.pdf>

¹⁴ Emily Workman, Michael Griffith, and Bruce Atchison (2014), *State Pre-K Funding – 2013-2014 Fiscal Year*, Education Commission of the States, available: <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/01/10/34/11034.pdf>

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¹⁷ Bruce Lesley presentation, December 11, 2013, available: <http://firstfocus.net/library/presentations/bruce-lesley-presentation-measuring-the-well-being-of-our-children>

¹⁸ Lisa Guernsey, Laura Bornfreund, Clare McCann, and Conor Williams (2014), *Subprime Learning: Early education in America since the Great Recession*, New America Foundation, available:

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²⁰ W. Steven Barnett (2013), *Expanding Access to Quality Pre-K is Sound Public Policy*, NIEER.