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**The Early Care and Education Workforce:  
Recommendations to the Obama-Biden Transition Team  
December, 2008**

President-elect Obama knows that any educational reform has to address the needs of young children from birth to five in America, and that changes must be rooted in solutions that make sense for working families. The President-elect also knows that new approaches to how we recruit, prepare, support, and reward teachers are the cornerstones of educational reform in K-12 education. Likewise, such approaches are desperately needed to transform the early childhood education teaching profession, in order to fulfill the Administration's vision of lifelong success through education for all children.

For the last thirty years or more, the early care and education field has suffered from a lack of regulation and a neglected infrastructure, like so many other industries in the United States. But for early care and education, this period hit when the field was rapidly expanding, due to the increased numbers of women joining the paid labor market, along with the effects of welfare reform. Now, at a time when science tells us that the early years matter the most, and when educators and policy makers are looking to early education to close the achievement gap between children living in poverty, especially children of color, and their peers, the profession faces a tremendous "performance gap" between its aspirations to enhance children's development and learning, and its ability to do so.

This gap is particularly evident in how we recruit, prepare, retain and reward early care and education teachers. Because of limited resources, the operative policy questions for this workforce have been, "What's the least that teachers need to know, and what's the least we need to pay them?" in the name of serving the greatest *quantity* of children, whether or not they are being served *well*. We have grown a larger system, yet we know practically nothing about the return on our investment, which is likely undermined by extremely low wages, high turnover, and uneven professional preparation.

We recommend extending the key provisions of the Obama-Biden teaching quality plan, outlined in the *Plan for Lifelong Success through Education*, to include the early care and education workforce. In some instances, proposed programs should explicitly include this workforce, while others will need to be adapted to align with regulations and structures of the early care and education field, and might best be placed in the Early Learning Challenge Grants. Because of very little federal attention to these issues for many years, innovation has occurred almost exclusively in states, such as



Illinois, Massachusetts, California, North Carolina and New Jersey, and their policies provide important models for the incoming administration.

Below, we comment on the five main elements of the teaching quality plan, and their application to the early care and education field.

*Expand service scholarships to underwrite high-quality preparation for teachers.*

Prospective preschool teachers should be included in the Teaching Service Scholarship program. In addition, federal dollars should be available to expand state efforts to assist current members of the early care and education workforce seeking to return to school and complete degrees. Such scholarships are particularly needed for those seeking to meet new degree requirements for teachers in Head Start and publicly funded pre-K programs.

*Support ongoing improvements in teacher education to enable teachers to meet the challenges of their demanding jobs.*

In addition to the specific programs outlined in the plan, it is necessary to include additional programs that meet the needs of the early care and education workforce. This workforce is composed primarily of working adults with families, many of whom are among the first generation of their families to attend college, and many of whom do not speak English as their first language. Like many other “nontraditional” students in higher education today, this highly motivated workforce benefits strongly from flexible class schedules and locations, online classes, cohort structures, and academic and technological tutoring. Institutions of higher education need incentives, too, to expand the quality and quantity of their early childhood education offerings, and there is an urgent need for graduate-level opportunities to develop an ethnically and linguistically diverse leadership pool.

*Provide mentoring for beginning teachers so that more of them stay in teaching and develop sophisticated skills.*

Many early care and education teachers begin with little or no training, and their first jobs with young children essentially serve as “field placements” or “student teaching,” but without the benefit of mentoring support. Therefore, mentoring should be expanded for the early care and education workforce to include those who are pursuing higher education while already working with children. In addition, early childhood educators increasingly are the first teachers for children who are most at-risk for later failure in school, including children with special needs and English language learners. In order to build high-quality programs, it is essential to offer these early educators professional development that builds sophisticated skills and knowledge in recognizing the challenges, and building on the strengths, of all children.

*Create incentives for shared planning and learning time for teachers.*

Many early care and education teachers do not receive paid planning and learning time, and this feature of the Obama-Biden plan is essential to reaping the benefits of education and training, encouraging teachers to reflect and build on their classroom practice in order to continually renew and strengthen their effectiveness.



*Support career pathways that provide ongoing professional development and reward accomplished teachers for their expertise.*

Low pay and very limited rewards for educational attainment undermine efforts to build a skilled and stable early care and education workforce. Many states are engaged in building career ladders that standardize qualifications across sectors of the field, and many members of the early care and education workforce are enthusiastically engaged in professional development and education. Without federal support, however, states are unable to reward such teachers for investing in their education, or to ensure equity in salaries and benefits for those who attain education comparable to that of K-12 teachers. A policy of financial reward as members of this workforce move up the career ladder is an essential part of ensuring quality education for children from birth to age five.

We applaud the incoming administration's inclusion of policy for children birth to five in its blueprint for education. This transformational approach heralds a necessarily ambitious vision for education in the 21st century. Now, the challenge is to integrate the various funding streams and programs, and sometimes conflicting policies, related to early childhood education that span not only the Department of Education and the Department of Health and Human Services, but also surface in other departments that address issues of nutrition and workforce development. We urge the early establishment of the Presidential Learning Council, so that as new initiatives are developed, a much-needed process of cross-fertilization and coordination will also occur.

As longtime researchers and leaders with acknowledged expertise in the field of early care and education workforce development, we would be happy to discuss these issues, and strategies for implementing them, in further detail with you at any time. More information about our work, as well as our many publications on the early care and education workforce, can also be found at our website, <http://www.irle.berkeley.edu/csce/>.