



*National Association of
Early Childhood Specialists in
State Departments of Education*

Writing on behalf of the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS-SDE), the association commends the Secretary for providing a strategic vision for the U. S. Department of Education (ED) and for education across the Nation.

Proposed Priority 1—Improving Early Learning and Development Outcomes.

NAECS-SDE is especially pleased that the foundation of the Department's strategic plan is early learning and agree that this first priority establishes the foundation for success for all children and youth and integrates with all of the following priorities to assure this success. We believe the support of projects outlined, implemented in concert across federal agencies, will go a long way toward assuring improvement of America's schools and outcomes for children along the learning continuum from cradle to career.

Proposed Priority 2—Influencing the Development of Non-Cognitive Factors.

NAECS-SDE is very enthused that the Administration is committed to extending developmental science into the K-12 years and beyond and believes this is consistent with a college and career ready agenda. We do suggest that "non-cognitive" is a misnomer, as it connotes that specific learning factors – such as executive functioning – are considered "soft-skills" and not as important as other content areas. In fact, the skills are grounded in the brain science and integrated with all areas of cognition. A suggested alternate term for this area might be "Social and Intellectual Habits." In addition, we suggest that the background material incorporate logic and reasoning.

Proposed Priority 3—Promoting Personalized Learning.

NAECS-SDE also commends the incorporation of personalized learning in the strategic priorities. We suggest that this extends – particularly in the early years – to individual learning modalities and includes much more than the use of technology to individualize instruction. We do support the appropriate use of technology tools for teachers and learners alike, but urge special attention to the recommended uses and cautions contained in the recent Fred Rogers/NAEYC policy statement found at:

http://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/PS_technology_WEB.pdf

NAECS-SDE | www.naecs-sde.org | information@naecs-sde.org

Deborah S. Adams
CT-President

John Pruette
NC-Vice President

Anna Severens
NV-Secretary

Amy Corriveau
AZ-Treasurer

Reneé DeMars-Johnson
MI- Past President

Proposed Priority 4—Improving Academic Outcomes for High-Need Students.

NAECS-SDE concurs and commends the newly launched initiative to move the Nation's best teachers into the classrooms serving our most vulnerable children, and asserts that this is extremely vital in the early years. We know this to be a complex challenge and contend that data is the starting place for making sound project design decisions. We recommend a taskforce be assigned to provide advice on the data needed (on both children and the workforce) in order to advance this priority.

Proposed Priority 5—Increasing Postsecondary Access, Affordability, and Completion.

Over the last several years, the ED has included the early childhood workforce in its initiatives related to student loans, and teacher preparation program improvement. We urge that this attention continue.

Proposed Priority 6—Improving Job-Driven Training and Employment Outcomes.

As with Priority 5, this priority focused on training and employment is key to addressing needs in the early childhood community. The individuals serving in programming from birth to age 8 are diverse and their pathways to credentialing and qualifications are often non-traditional. In addition, we know that job-embedded training and professional learning are key to the success of all teachers.

Proposed Priority 7—Promoting Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Education.

The Association appreciates the inclusion of "P" in the continuum of learners who benefit from appropriate STEM instruction and experiences. Early science and math are the foundation for assuring the Nation has the scientists and engineers we need for a productive future. In addition, math learning in young children has been correlated to impact literacy achievement and to be predictive of school success in all content areas in addition to reading. We urge concerted attention in both research and improvement projects focused on early math and science, along with the inclusion of professional learning demonstration projects in math and science for the teachers of young children.

Proposed Priority 8—Implementing Internationally Benchmarked College- and Career-Ready Standards and Assessments.

NAECS-SDE has been instrumental in the advocacy for high quality early learning standards birth to third grade and their trajectory to college and career readiness. We have been cautiously supportive of the appropriate assessment practices addressed in the projects here. We commend the continued attention to the principles in both the IOM –NAS Report on Early Childhood Assessment and the NAEYC-NAECS-SDE Policy statement on curriculum and assessment. As a state-based organization, we recognize that standards development needs to recognize the autonomy of states.

Proposed Priority 9—Improving Teacher Effectiveness and Promoting Equal Access to Effective Teachers.

Proposed Priority 9 is key to turning around persistently failing schools, assuring school success for vulnerable children and improving the odds for all of our school children. Positive results in this priority area are dependent on the solid implementation of the principles supporting nearly all of the previous priorities. In turn, the implementation of sound teacher effectiveness programs for teachers of young children are accompanied by some specific cautions. NAECS-SDE's key technical assistance partner, the Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes (CEELO), has conducted significant work in this area in their recent studies and has specific recommendations which our Association also echoes here:

- Go slowly with state wide roll-out and ensure sufficient organizational, human and fiscal capacity at the state and local level,
- Document processes and implementation fidelity,
- Involve early childhood teachers and other stakeholders in frequent and transparent communication,
- Plan to retool and redesign guidance, quality control resources, student learning objectives exemplars and rubrics, and other support materials, specifically for early childhood teachers,
- Provide on-going sustained training and technical assistance that builds in alignment and coherence across multiple policy reforms.

The full report from CEELO can be found at: http://ceelo.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/CEELO_policy_report_ece_teachereval_march_2014.pdf

Proposed Priority 10—Improving the Effectiveness of Principals.

For Priority 10 to be addressed fairly and with positive outcomes, the observers and instructional leaders must be able to evaluate good practice. Principal preparation, professional learning, and evaluation must assure that school administrators have solid knowledge about quality teaching and learning in the age groups for which they are responsible. Learning in pre-K, Kindergarten, and the early primary grades looks quite different from that in the later years of schooling. Principals should be fluent in observing and measuring good practice across the learning continuum.

Proposed Priority 11—Leveraging Technology to Support Instructional Practice and Professional Development.

See priority 2.

Proposed Priority 12—Promoting Diversity.

NAECS-SDE suggests that this priority is central and should be addressed in an integrated connection or inclusion to all of the 15 priorities, supporting diversity of the teaching workforce in addition to access to quality programs and services for all children.

Proposed Priority 13—Improving School Climate, Behavioral Supports, and Correctional Education.

A positive school climate and behavioral supports are basic conditions for all schools and all children. Suspension of very young children is seldom warranted. NAECS-SDE suggests that ED prohibit or significantly restrict federal grant recipients from suspending children before the age of 8.

Proposed Priority 14—Improving Parent, Family, and Community Engagement.

Family engagement and partnership to support their children's learning is essential to their success. The reciprocal nature of the relationship between families and schools is so important that we suggest it is paramount, and though difficult to do well, should be listed among the first or second priorities for the department.

Proposed Priority 15—Supporting Military Families and Veterans.

The Association recognizes and embraces the crucial role that early learning settings play in supporting military families, veterans, and particularly for the children who experience stressors unique during the preparation, deployment and reunification of families.