

On The Road to Change - A National Policy for Children

*A Statement from the
National Association of Early Childhood Specialists
in State Departments of Education regarding public policy in 1995.*

The National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE) is an organization with a twenty-two year history working through state departments of education to support the optimum development of young children by promoting effective practices and public policy. Membership includes 75 early childhood specialists from more than 45 states and a dedicated group of associate members who work in concert with the association's mission.

As the 104th Congress, governors, state legislators and chief state school officers begin a journey of change, NAECS/SDE stands ready to support positive efforts in the areas of early childhood and family development. Early learning is essential to development and life-long learning is the goal of all citizens in strong democratic societies. We endorse a national effort to improve the quality and availability of sound child development programs; as well as support institutions of higher education, each of whom prepares the workforce of the future.

Our perspective also compels us to request prudence to the leaders of our nation. It is critical to keep the focus on the goal when making policy decisions regarding children. The goal is to improve the formal and informal systems that address the development of children and families. In the haste to make change, we urge all leaders of our nation to remember that change made for any other goal is fraught with problems. Consolidation and elimination of programs in the name of fiscal economy may not provide the solution to the problem. The economy of our actions must also be taken into account. The goal must be based on the healthy human growth of children, families, and communities. Balancing the budget in lieu of a strong educational system is not sound policy.

Professionals in the field of early childhood recognize that the existing maze of federal programs for children and families is complex. Services for young children and families typically cross over categories which include health, human services, and education. Traditionally, human services work more with the youngest children through family child care, center-based child care programs, food programs, and health care. Historically, departments of education have worked with young children and their families when they reach the eligible ages for public school services. These early years are critical for healthy human development. More recently, schools have recognized the full range of needs of many families by linking to existing services provided through many health and human service organizations at the local level.

Departments of education at the state level are building bridges to other agencies and have encouraged more of the federal legislation to enable the local community schools and agencies to address these issues. In many cases, schools are the most stable environments for many children. Educational programs are a sound investment from both a fiscal and human capital perspective. We can nurture prevention and reduce our long standing practices of remediation.