



The National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education join with others in the belief that rich and supportive early experiences and supports for young children and their families is of critical value to our country now and in the future. These early experiences lay groundwork for building strong foundations so children become successful, lifelong learners. Our Association strongly supports the Obama-Biden administration's vision and position on early childhood education.

We are an organization with the vision of supporting continuous early learning. It will be important to recognize that as new systems and frameworks are established that they be focused and targeted to supporting high quality early learning experiences. It will also be crucial to ensure these systems are connected and linked from the children's earliest years through the primary grades. The end goal is that our nation's young children are supported across the continuum of their early development and learning processes.

There will undoubtedly be many positions taken on the best strategies to support young children and their families. We believe the framework that best accomplishes this goal reflects a comprehensive and collaborative approach. It is not possible to rely on one aspect of support – such as education – if the end goal is successful learners. Experience and research provide strong evidence that a broader perspective is essential to a quality, early learning process.

First and most important, those charged with developing and implementing policies must rely on the perspective that early childhood learning occurs within a system of services for children and their families from before birth and extends through the primary grades. Education plays a major role preparing children to be successful learners, but it is also crucial that children have access to adequate health and mental health care and nutrition services. Successful learning happens when children are healthy and their hunger is for knowledge (and not food).

It is also important to recognize and cherish the rich diversity represented in the families with young children that make up our society. All young children deserve access to high quality early education services, including children with disabilities, children who are dual language learners, and children who live in families that are economically challenged. Supporting ongoing research on best practices for effective learning strategies to use with this diverse group of children remains critical.

The Association respectfully requests that you consider these recommendations as your new framework for early childhood education takes shape.

1. Establish the Office of Early Childhood within the White House with Offices of Early Learning in both the Department of Education and the Department of Health and Human Services.

The purpose of establishing Offices in the Executive Branch would be to recognize that this agenda requires a cross-Cabinet and cross-Department effort at a level never previously seen. Creating such an approach lends credibility to the perspective that supporting young children and their families requires an integrated, collaborative and comprehensive approach and thus cannot be the sole responsibility of one department.

- The Offices should have high level representatives that function as liaisons among the White House and the Departments of Education and Health and Human Services
- Both Departments (with White House oversight) would coordinate budgets and activities for early childhood programs and initiatives.
- Both Departments (with White House oversight) would coordinate and collaborate in research and technical assistance activities.
- These interagency efforts should support the establishment and continuing operations of statewide Quality Rating Improvement Systems that impact all entities providing early education services to children below kindergarten at the state level.
- Establish a federal framework that reflects and supports a coordinated approach to services for children and families.
- Support integrated and blended funding streams and regulations at regional, state and local levels.
- Support initiatives that reflect the integration of programs such as Head Start, IDEA/619, Even Start, Early Reading First, and the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS) Grants.
- Federal leadership is imperative to ensure equal access to high quality educational experiences, family support and physical and mental health services needed by young children and their families.
- Interagency efforts should support an emphasis on integrated evaluation and assessment of federally funded programs to reduce duplicity in effort and a focus on appropriate accountability processes.
- Provide assurances that any form of accountability that involves the assessment of young children: (1) requires the use of measures appropriate to the age of the child; (2) measures appropriate program and child performance; and 3) is preceded by adequate funding for the programs being measured.

2. Strengthen supports and resources for infants and toddlers and their families.

- Continue to expand services through Early Head Start.
- Provide grants to support the establishment of community-based family and child centers that focus on high-quality, coordinated services to both populations. These centers need to have close links with their respective local public education agencies.
- Establish an entity to ensure ongoing support for families of young children.

3. Fully fund and strengthen existing programs as established under statute or regulation within respective Departments.

- Strengthen support to states to promote high quality prekindergarten -grade 3 early childhood programs by expanding the emphasis on early childhood education in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Continue funding for ESEA initiatives focused on early reading, and restore funding to the Even Start Family Literacy Program.
- Fully fund Head Start.
- Support substantial increases in the Child Care and Development Block Grant, including support for quality improvement.
- Fully fund IDEA/Part B/Section 619 and IDEA-Part C programs.
- Provide stronger support for the Child and Adult Care Food program.
- Support state-level pre-kindergarten programs that reflect an integrated, collaborative and coordinated system perspective across federal, state and local early childhood initiatives. This integrated approach should be designed to ensure that all three and four year olds have high quality early learning opportunities available.
- Harmonize regulations to ensure that research-based elements of best practice are supported and practiced across funding streams (e.g., removing barriers to serving children with disabilities in inclusive settings).

4. Expand and Strengthen Research and Technical Assistance in Early Learning.

- Fund research and demonstration projects identifying effective instructional practices and curriculums that effectively support children's development.
- Fund research to assist states in examining effective strategies for establishing, operating, and evaluating Quality Rating Improvement Systems.
- Support research and technical assistance projects that reflect collaborative initiatives between the Departments of Education and Health and Human Services.
- Support research examining personnel preparation and teacher certification issues in early childhood.

We stand ready to work with you and your administration as you develop and strengthen these strategic efforts. Thank you for raising early childhood development and learning to such prominence as your administration prepares to address the nation's challenges.

NAECS-SDE (National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education) is a national organization for state education agency staff members with major responsibilities in the field of early childhood education. The Association promotes high-quality services to young children and their families through improvement of instruction, curriculum, and administration of programs. Members of the Association have an opportunity to share ideas and to work together toward the solution of common problems. Visit us at www.naecs-sde.org.