

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman, Senate Committee on Health,
Education, Labor and Pensions

The Honorable Virginia Foxx
Chairwoman, House Committee on Education
and the Workforce

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Health,
Education, Labor and Pensions

The Honorable Bobby Scott
Ranking Member, House Committee on
Education and the Workforce

Dear Committee Leaders,

As a group of national and state early childhood organizations dedicated to increasing access to high-quality early childhood education, we applaud the work of your Committees in the achievement of the bipartisan reauthorizations of both the Child Care and Development Block Grant, as well as the Every Student Succeeds Act. We are writing now to offer updated recommendations regarding the upcoming reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA), which plays a crucial role in supporting students and parents as well as current and future early childhood educators.

High-quality early learning opportunities help provide the foundation children need to lead healthy and successful lives. Supporting the teachers who directly serve children in early childhood education settings is key to ensuring that our youngest learners have a path to college- and career-readiness. Our organizations are committed to promoting an HEA reauthorization strategy that advances the quality of and access to early childhood education by increasing: the quality of early childhood educator preparation programs; the postsecondary education and credential attainment of early childhood educators and leaders; and the pipeline of potential educators and leaders across our nation. We also encourage Congress to focus on ensuring that institutions of higher education and their programs—particularly educator and leader preparation programs—are providing the supports needed to ensure both access and completion, and direct resources to supporting much needed innovations and research in this area.

High-quality early childhood programs, which provide important benefits to children, families and our nation's economy, depend on skilled, supported and knowledgeable early childhood educators. Congress has been a powerful advocate for and generated a supportive track record on early learning. The reauthorization of HEA presents a unique opportunity for Congress to help build a stronger early childhood education profession and help set our nation's young children on a path to success by:

- Improving the clarity, flexibility, affordability, accessibility and effectiveness of federal student aid, particularly for early childhood educators
- Ensuring that early childhood educators working in center, home and faith-based settings, in addition to school settings, are eligible for school loan forgiveness and cancellation programs
- Maintaining the Higher Education Act's Title II Teacher Quality Partnership (TQP) grants and including early childhood educators in educator preparation initiatives on a consistent basis
- Increasing the alignment of professional development systems across the education continuum, from early learning to postsecondary education

Specifically, we urge Congress to:

Support students enrolled in early childhood education preparation programs

By supporting the pipeline and quality preparation of early childhood educators, institutions can provide the necessary tools for teachers to positively impact children's learning and development at a critical stage of their development.

- Maintain and expand direct student financial assistance, loan forgiveness, loan cancellation, and other federal student financial aid benefits for students pursuing early childhood education degrees and credentials at institutions of higher education
- Explicitly clarify that early childhood educators serving across settings are eligible for the benefits conferred in relevant loan forgiveness and cancellation programs
- Amend relevant definitions throughout Title IV, such as "Early Childhood Educator", and the parameters around teachers eligible for loan forgiveness, to ensure that assistant, lead, and master teachers in early childhood education programs, as well as coaches to educators and leaders can also access the full range of Title IV financial aid benefits available to other educators and leaders
- Ensure that any loan repayment requirements and/or required or suggested accountability metrics on program or institutional quality consider both costs to students and post-college labor market outcomes, in order to account for programs that prepare students for careers in low-wage but high need, high value professions, such as early learning
- Encourage institutions to support early childhood education activities as part of the campus' Work-Study program where available
- Encourage institutions to support students who are also parents by providing assistance to help them pay for child care while they complete their degrees and credentials; for example, by expanding the CCAMPIS program
- Ensure continued access to year-round Pell Grants to support early childhood educators who are often working while they are in school – frequently in the context of community colleges which provide year-round academic offerings
- Eliminate the requirement, or increase the lifetime limit for students accessing to Pell Grants, which will benefit early childhood educators, to acknowledge the cost realities of necessary remediation and non-seamless articulation policies

Improve programs that prepare early childhood educators and leaders

Improving the quality of programs that prepare early childhood educators and leaders has a direct impact on improving the quality of early childhood programs themselves. Attending to the alignment of professional development systems can also support educators working in a variety of settings and sectors to deliver high-quality early childhood education to all children, in their earliest years and beyond.

- Maintain Title II Teacher Quality Partnership grants, and include early childhood educators consistently in educator preparation initiatives under Title II, including residency programs, clinical experience and interaction, induction programs, and leadership programs
- Clarify that under TQP grants, participants in educator residency and induction programs may be placed in licensed, regulated child care and Head Start programs, as well as school settings

- Language stating that early childhood educators and early childhood education programs are included in these teacher preparation initiatives "as appropriate" should be removed
- Maintain investments in early childhood educator compensation—for those who have attained an Associate's or Bachelor's degree—as a provision of Teacher Quality Partnership grants to help ensure a high quality workforce
- Recognize the importance of programmatic accreditation, as distinct from institutional accreditation, in any reforms to the law
- Revise definitions in Title II to best reflect the unique needs of early childhood education programs including “Early Childhood Educator” to include master teachers, lead teachers and classroom aides; “Early Childhood Programs” to include programs serving children through the “age of school entry” rather than through “the age of 6”; and “High-Need Early Childhood Education Program” to allow an alternate metric of the high concentration of poverty in the population served
- Support efforts at institutions of higher education to ensure all educators and leaders, including principals and directors, develop knowledge, skills and competencies that allow them to:
 - Support children from diverse cultural, linguistic and socio-economic backgrounds across all early childhood education settings;
 - Differentiate instruction that builds on best practices of what is developmentally appropriate;
 - Create a language-rich, child-focused, and highly interactive classroom environment;
 - Gain specific knowledge related to areas of dual language learning and early math alongside all domains of learning and development;
 - Successfully implement and utilize formative child assessments, for developmentally appropriate purposes only—namely, to inform and improve educators’ practices.
- Ensure alignment of teacher preparation programs with ongoing state professional development systems as well as state early childhood standards and systems

As you continue your work on the reauthorization of HEA, we urge you to maximize this opportunity to strengthen early childhood education and the early childhood workforce that forms the foundation for a high quality system of early learning options for parents and families. Your leadership on early childhood education has helped move our country forward towards a stronger start for all children regardless of background, and we hope that work and commitment continues through this reauthorization process. We look forward to working with you as you craft a reauthorization bill, and we stand ready to provide any information you might need.

Sincerely,

National Association for the Education of Young Children
 American Federation of Teachers
 California Child Care Resource & Referral Network
 Center for Law and Social Policy
 Child Care Aware of America
 Children’s Alliance (Washington State)
 Early Care and Education Consortium
 First Five Years Fund
 First5CA

Indiana Association for the Education of Young Children
Maine Association for the Education of Young Children
Missouri Association for the Education of Young Children
National Association for Family Child Care
National Human Services Assembly
National Women's Law Center
Northern Virginia Association for the Education of Young Children
New York State Association for the Education of Young Children
Ounce of Prevention Fund
Pittsburgh Association for the Education of Young Children
Rhode Island Association for the Education of Young Children
Save the Children Action Network
Virginia Association for the Education of Young Children
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