

**Testimony of Dr. Kathy R. Thornburg**  
**U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions**  
**March 15, 2002**

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Members of the Committee, I am pleased to have the opportunity to discuss with you today the reauthorization of the Child Care and Development Block Grant and how investments in the early childhood workforce will make a significant difference in the lives of our young children and their readiness for success in school. I speak before you as an early childhood educator, a parent, and on behalf of NAEYC, the nation's largest early childhood education organization that is engaged at all levels in ensuring that all children have access to affordable, high quality early childhood education.

Roughly 12 million children below school age are in some form of non-parental care during the week. The quality of the experiences they have in child care and other early childhood settings provides a foundation for success in school and beyond.

Research tells us that high quality child care makes a difference for young children's math and literacy skills, behavior, and over time, completion of school and lower incidence of juvenile delinquency. *The Children of the Cost, Quality, Outcomes Study Go to School*, a study by the National Center for Early Childhood Development and Learning at the University of North Carolina, found that programs with additional resources could devote more of their funds to hiring staff with better qualifications and to providing better compensation, and that those programs experienced lower staff turnover rates and higher quality care for the children. In addition, the study found that children with close teacher-child relationships had better social development and behavior that carried through the early school years. Likewise, the National Academy of Sciences report, *Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*, a report synthesizing the scientific knowledge of children's development, said that providing quality would also require increases in staff compensation as well as professional development.

It should come as no surprise that the people – the teachers and other staff – are the key to quality in child care and other early childhood programs. Again, research tells us that programs that provide adequate compensation are more likely to have good teachers.

The lesson is clear: the benefits of good-quality early childhood programs will only be achieved when investments in child care and other early childhood education programs finance the full cost of providing high-quality services. The full cost must include equitable compensation of well-qualified and competent staff and must also ensure affordable access for all families to good programs. It is this aspect of what will help all children be ready for school and for lifelong success that I will speak to today.

We have a long way to go. A parking lot attendant earns more than a child care professional. The average child care teacher in a center-based program earns only \$16,000 a year, often without health care or other benefits. Many child care professionals are so inadequately compensated that they themselves are eligible for child care assistance for their own children. It is no wonder then, that roughly a third of child care staff in this

country leave their programs each year in pursuit of a salary that will help them feed, clothe and house their own families, even when it means leaving the work they love.

I am one of several researchers with the Midwest Child Care Consortium--we are from Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska. We completed the first year of data collection a few months ago and you will find some of the results on the table attached to my written testimony. Gallup called 920 infant, toddler, and preschool teachers through a random selection process. Forty percent of the teachers had at least a 2-year child development degree. Almost 60% of the teachers earned less than \$15,000 a year.

I liken the child care workforce situation to a bucket with a gaping hole. States require very little, if any, preservice training in child development or early education before an individual can work in child care. The financing of child care is largely a matter of parent fees and inadequate child care reimbursement rates. As a result, the people who care for and prepare our young children for lifelong learning bear the brunt of a poorly financed system with grossly inadequate compensation.

A recent report by Marcy Whitebook of the University of California-Berkeley studied staffing patterns in 75 relatively high quality child care centers in California. Seventy-five percent of the teachers in those centers in 1996 and 40 percent of the directors were no longer in those jobs just four years later. And the individuals who replaced them came with lower education and training. The hole in the bucket simply does not get repaired without real attention to the compensation crisis.

Child care teachers enter the field, receive training or college degrees, and then have no incentives to stay in their programs, or in the field at large. Providing more professional development that is not tied to increased compensation is not the remedy. A child care teacher who gets her Bachelors Degree can – and often does – move to the public school system to teach kindergarten for double the pay and benefits. Quite simply, the inadequate funding for child care actually drives many better educated and qualified staff out of child care programs.

Michigan's preschool program provides a good example. The Michigan School Readiness Program is a half-day preschool program for children at risk of school failure. In 2001-2002 the program served 26,000 children across Michigan. The program requires that all lead-teachers have bachelor's degrees with an early childhood education endorsement. In programs where these teachers are not part of the collective bargaining unit, staff turnover is very high due to the attraction of higher salaries in elementary schools.

For teaching positions that required teacher certification, but where teachers were excluded from the district-wide teacher compensation package:

- One-third of the positions turned-over in the 1998-1999 program year, over double the rate for on-contract preschool teachers;
- Only 34% of the positions had been filled by the same teacher for 5 years or more;
- Compensation was about one-half as much as positions that were covered under the district-wide contract.

**A Kindergarten Readiness Program Manager in the Lansing Michigan Public School District reports that for a three county area (Ingaham, Eaton and Clinton) where none of the MSRP teachers are on contract, that 50% or more of the preschool teaching staff turn over every year. When they leave, they nearly all go into elementary schools. The school district sees preschool as a stepping stone. They use it as a feeder program for their elementary grades. They lose almost 2 to 3 months of the program every fall as they try to fill positions, which compromises the stability and quality of the program. It also raises the cost of professional development. As qualified teachers leave, new teachers come on board who need the training that the former teachers had received.**

**As this example shows, the importance of compensation cannot be downplayed when setting policies to promote quality early childhood education. We are hearing from other states that this problem is not unique to Michigan.**

**We do have successful examples of how the quality of children's early learning and development can be enhanced when focused attention is paid to linking professional development with higher compensation. The U.S. military transformed its child care system from dismal to high quality in large measure by providing better compensation and increased training tied to compensation increases. As a result, the military child care system has experienced dramatic reduction in staff turnover, and now has much higher professionalism and staff morale.**

**As you heard from Sue Russell when she testified before this Committee just last month, there are successful efforts in many states to raise both the quality of the child care workforce and to provide the compensation assistance that will help them stay in their programs. The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood ® Project, now in 19 states including my own state of Missouri, provides scholarships that help pay for education, tuition, books, release time, and travel stipends. The child care program helps support some of the costs. When the child care teacher finishes the professional development, she is eligible for a bonus or raise, so long as she commits to remaining in her program for another year. Participating teachers can renew their TEACH scholarship for a long as it takes them to earn their degrees, sometimes several years because they are simultaneously working. For those teachers who already have college degrees, there are programs to help keep them in the field. Programs like WAGES in North Carolina and CARES in California provide graduated wage supplements to participating teachers based on their level of education.**

**Both the scholarship and retention compensation initiatives link quality with compensation. States and communities are seeing results from these efforts in lower teacher turnover and better-educated child care teachers. But expansion of these programs must happen at a faster pace. Many of the states using TEACH and WAGES projects are using the Child Care and Development Block Grant as a key component of the financing.**

**The National Association for the Education of Young Children, the world's largest early childhood education association, supports federal legislation introduced last year, known as the FOCUS Act, that would take these TEACH and WAGES-like projects to a much larger scale across the nation. That legislation has been incorporated as a**

**second title in the CCDBG reauthorization bill introduced by Representative George Miller. We very much hope that it will be a part of the Senate's reauthorization legislation.**

**Children cannot wait another five years for the next CCDBG reauthorization to provide the resources to tackle the intertwined crisis of quality, affordability, and compensation. We can make a significant investment in CCDBG now, helping to raise the amount spent on quality and particularly compensation, as well as helping more families afford good child care. Or, we can fail to make the investment today and pay the price: high educational failure, increased delinquency, lowered self-sufficiency and productivity, and fewer adults prepared to be effective, loving parents to the next generation of children.**

**Thank you for listening--and caring about young children and their teachers.**

Attachment – Testimony of Dr. Kathy Thornburg

March 15, 2002

Midwest Child Care Consortium

(Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska)

Gallup did telephone surveys of 920 randomly selected teachers of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers.

| Educational Level:           |     | Salaries:      |     |
|------------------------------|-----|----------------|-----|
|                              | #   |                | #   |
| High School/GED              | 214 | 10K            | 142 |
| Some Training Beyond H.S.    | 258 | 10K up to 15 K | 399 |
| Yr. Child Development Degree | 81  | 15K up to 20 K | 217 |
| Yr. College Degree           | 160 | 20K up to 25 K | 94  |
| Yr. College Degree           | 153 | 25 K           | 68  |
| Graduate School              | 54  |                |     |