

Providing Parents, Teachers, and Caregivers Information on Early Learning

Overview

Children need parents, teachers, and others to prepare them for success in school and in life. Scientific research clearly demonstrates that parents and preschool programs can use specific activities to prepare children for school. But there is a gap between what we know and what we do in early childhood education. In order to close this gap, the Department of Education will establish partnerships with private, public, and civic groups to highlight the importance of early childhood development. These partnerships will provide to a wide audience of parents, pre-school providers, teachers, policy-makers, and the public, information and curriculum to help guide children effectively toward successful vocabulary development, pre-reading, and numeracy skills.

Summary of Initiatives

Highlight Early Childhood Education Research. The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development will work with offices in the Department of Education and the Administration for Children and Families within HHS to identify the most effective early pre-reading and language curricula and teaching strategies for early childhood educators and caregivers. This \$45 million, five-year research initiative represents the first time in the history of these Departments that the full range of talent and resources within the Federal Government has been marshaled to address a topic of major significance involving our Nation's children.

The objective of this initiative is to determine through rigorous experimental methods how best to provide children from birth through age 5 with the interactions essential for developing the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that lead to a smooth transition to early school achievement. The initiative will answer the following questions:

- Which approaches are most effective for which children, at which stages of development, and under which conditions and settings?
- What knowledge and skills do adults need to effectively implement these approaches?
- What are effective approaches for providing adults with the knowledge and skills essential for implementing the curricula with positive results?

Researchers will establish partnerships with early childhood program sites supported at Federal, State, and community levels. Sites may include Head Start, Early Head Start, pre-kindergarten programs, center-based child care, and family day care. Researchers will identify curricula that effectively promote language and cognitive development, early literacy, and mathematics concepts and skills, while simultaneously developing children's self-regulatory and social-emotional competencies, motivation, and positive attitudes toward learning. The findings will help guide the structure of early childhood programs and training for early childhood education teachers and other adults responsible for children's learning and development.

Provide a Guidebook for Parents and Families. A series of booklets titled "Healthy Start, Grow Smart" will provide helpful information on ways to assure the health, safety, nutrition, and cognitive development of newborns and will be made available to new parents as well as online. Modeled after a similar program that First Lady Laura Bush initiated in Texas, the series will be launched at the national level to provide parents and families with more information on a child's development during the crucial first stages of life.

Provide a Guidebook for Early Childhood Educators and Caregivers. The Early Childhood-Head Start Task Force will make available to educators and caregivers a guidebook on steps they can take with children to ensure strong cognitive development while supporting strong social and emotional development. *Teaching Our Youngest* acknowledges the important role preschool teachers and child care and family providers play in the lives of young children.

Teaching Our Youngest will provide concrete examples to caregivers for use in their daily interactions with children. Also included are strategies for creating a preschool environment that addresses all of the children's developmental domains. Early childhood educators may use this guidebook to assist them in designing programs that incorporate cognitive development and early literacy activities into a comprehensive program. Through specific demonstrations, teachers will learn simple strategies to nurture the natural curiosity of children and their zest for learning.

Award "Sunshine" Schools and Initiatives. The Department of Education will highlight exemplary preschool programs and initiatives throughout the country and make available best practices from States, counties, school districts, pre-k programs, Head Start sites and child care centers.