
EDUCATION & LABOR COMMITTEE

Congressman George Miller, Chairman

Tuesday, March 17, 2009
Press Office, 202-226-0853

Chairman Miller Statement at Committee Hearing On “*The Importance of Early Childhood Development*”

WASHINGTON, D.C. – *Below are the prepared remarks of U.S. Rep. George Miller (D-CA), chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee, for a committee hearing on “The Importance of Early Childhood Development.”*

Today’s hearing is about how Congress can strengthen early childhood development and education.

As President Obama rightly said in his first major speech on education last week, any significant education reform effort must start with children before they enter their kindergarten classrooms. If we only start focusing on kids at kindergarten and on – it’s five years too late.

Over the past decade, there has been groundbreaking research on brain and child development that underscores the importance of the first five years of a child’s life.

In combination with their genes, children’s experiences in these critical early years influence brain chemistry, architecture, and growth in ways that can have lasting effects on their health, learning, and behavior. The Early Childhood Longitudinal Study overseen by the Department of Education, for example, found that twice as many 4-year-olds from upper-income family households were proficient in early math skills when compared to 4-year-olds from the lowest income households.

High quality early education can improve children’s reading, math, and language skills, strengthen parenting practices that help increase school readiness, and lead to better health and behavior.

Studies also show all children benefit from high quality early education programs, with children from low-income families showing the largest benefits.

Investing in early childhood will help ensure our next generation of workers is stronger, more innovative and more competitive. It’s an investment that yields great returns. Every dollar spent on early childhood education can generate anywhere from \$1.25 to \$17 in returns.

But we have a long way to go to ensure that all children can get a high-quality early education foundation.

Today, nearly 12 million of the 18.5 million children under 5 in this country are in some type of regular child care or early education setting.

Children with working mothers spend on average 36 hours per week in early learning settings.

Child care costs for families with young children are generally the single highest or second highest spending cost, after housing. Parents need more affordable, quality early education settings for their children as they work longer hours or take on a second job.

Unfortunately, research suggests that the quality of child care in this country is mediocre. This is not surprising given the weak and variable standards in most states for early learning programs.

The vast majority of states have no training requirement for child care providers prior to working in a classroom. And thirteen state pre-k programs meet five or fewer of 10 key quality criteria.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act provides emergency funding for child care, Head Start, and Early Head Start to expand opportunities for more low-income children, and create tens of thousands of new jobs.

This is a good start -- but more needs to be done.

In his budget blueprint, President Obama outlined his plan to build on these key investments. He proposes creating incentives for states to support comprehensive and coordinated high quality early childhood programs for children age birth to five.

I think these are the right types of investments. I look forward to working in a bipartisan way with the Obama Administration, to ensure our youngest children are provided the early learning opportunities they need to succeed in school and in life.

There are initiatives across the country leading the way that show that investments in high quality early education can make a tremendous difference in children's futures – both inside and outside of the classroom.

Today we will hear from witnesses who have sound and sensible ideas on how we can bring about early childhood reform.

We look forward to hearing from each of you about what is being done to help our youngest children. Few issues are more critical to the future prosperity of our country.

###