

Testimony to the House Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary  
Education

Susan Russell, March 19, 2009

Chairman Kildee, Ranking Member Castle, and members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for this opportunity. I am President of Child Care Services Association, a private nonprofit agency located in North Carolina that has been working every day for the last 35 years to ensure access to high quality, affordable child care. We believe that improving the education, compensation and retention of the early childhood workforce is key to producing positive health and educational outcomes for young children.

In 1990, using data from the state's first early childhood workforce study, Child Care Services Association set out to test a scholarship model designed to address the low education, poor compensation and high turnover of the workforce. We began as a small pilot program with scholarships to help 21 teachers take community college courses leading to an associate degree in early childhood education. This successful pilot became T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood®, rapidly expanding in North Carolina and gradually to 20 other states.

T.E.A.C.H. scholarships help pay tuition, books and travel costs, and often require and support paid release time to allow teachers to balance the extra load of going to school. As teachers complete their required credit hours, they receive a bonus or raise, and they must then commit to continue teaching in the field for another year.

In most T.E.A.C.H. states, teachers, directors and family child care providers working in child care, Head Start or pre-k settings are eligible for scholarships. T.E.A.C.H. scholarships always support formal coursework leading to credentials or degrees and require a partnership between individuals, their employers and the T.E.A.C.H. program, with each entity contributing to the cost. A scholarship counselor helps the individual maneuver the challenges of balancing school, work, family and scholarship responsibilities. In FY08 the 21 states participating in T.E.A.C.H. spent about \$28.3 million; the largest source of these funds comes from the Child Care and Development Block Grant.

Last year over 21,000 individuals across the country, working in over 10,000 different early care and education programs, received support from T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® scholarships. Ten percent worked in Head Start programs and 62% taught three and four year olds. About 46% were women of color, typically earning less than \$10 per hour. They attended almost 600 different colleges and universities. Together, these scholarship recipients completed almost 130,000 credit hours. Their average earnings in most states increased between 7 and 10 percent and they left their classrooms at average rates of less than 8 percent annually. And this is in a field that routinely experiences 40% turnover a year. While attending a community college, teachers' basic language and math literacy skills improve, as well as their knowledge of cognitive, social, emotional and physical development. About two-thirds of participants were working on their associate degrees, doing this while working full-time, and achieving a 3.25 mean grade point average.

In 1994, as our next step to address the systemic problems of low wages and high turnover, CCSA began the Child Care WAGE\$ program. This effort provides graduated supplements paid directly to participants and tied to their level of education. Supplements are paid every six months with funding from Smart Start and CCDBG, as long as the individual remains in her early care and education program. Supplements range from \$200 to \$6,250 annually. Last year, we had almost 9,000 participants. Because supplement amounts increase with more education, WAGE\$ participants continue their education. WAGE\$ participants with two- or four-year degrees had a 14% turnover rate, which is identical to the rate of teachers in our K-12 system. Two other states have WAGE\$ programs. In many states with either T.E.A.C.H. or WAGE\$ programs, there are waiting lists for participation; other states need funds to get these programs started.

Investing in high quality early care and education is essential for all of our children from birth to five if we want to stay competitive in a global economy. Disparate access to quality exists across age groups, and for children within states and between states. States struggle to make the right choices, but resources are not adequate. With so many families unable to afford high quality child care and without the resources to help them, state administrators continually choose between quality and quantity. More funding is needed to ensure a uniform level of quality for all young children. The reauthorization of CCDBG provides us with such an opportunity. And we believe that one area that must be targeted with increased investments is raising the education and compensation of the early childhood workforce.

Children of college-educated mothers have significantly better vocabularies by the age of three and far better educational outcomes than children with mothers with a high school education or less. Because early childhood educators act in loco parentis, often with young children 10 hours a day, 5 days a week, it is critical that they are well educated, supported and culturally competent. Investments in increased educational opportunities tied to compensation and benefits provide early educators with a viable, sustainable career path in a field in which they will remain committed. T.E.A.C.H. scholarships and wage supplements help the early childhood workforce become better educated, compensated and consistent as it strives to meet the higher standards associated with pre-kindergarten, Head Start and Quality Rating Systems. And direct investment in the workforce means that quality can be raised without burdening parents with additional costs.

We have learned a lot in the last 19 years implementing these strategies in North Carolina and across the country. It is clear that the early childhood workforce wants to increase its knowledge and skills through our nation's higher education system. The key is accessibility...having the money, the time and the support to make it possible. However, it is both unrealistic and unfair to expect the workforce to go back to school while they are working full time without help and without the promise of better wages and benefits.

We have learned that with sufficient investment in the workforce, you can improve education and retention. North Carolina's turnover rates are down and the education of the workforce is up...and the overall quality of early care and education has dramatically improved. Money makes the difference. When teachers are living on poverty level wages and barely able to support their families, then leaving the job they love becomes a matter of necessity. Low

education, poor compensation and high turnover are workforce issues across our nation. It is time to address them with a national targeted investment. Thank you.