# **Early Childhood Education From Birth Through Age 8**

The economic and societal benefits of high-quality early childhood education for all young children, beginning at birth and continuing through the early grades, are better known and appreciated than ever before. Early childhood as a distinct period of life has value in itself as well as a foundation for later school, work, and life success. Yet we still lack the full policies and resources needed to create an education continuum, grounded in our knowledge of child development, which addresses appropriate standards, curricula, and assessments, along with the specialized teacher professional preparation and support, and with comprehensive services for children and families.

#### Birth Through Age 3:

Children are learning as soon as they are born, and the quality of their experiences, starting at birth, have a significant impact on healthy brain and body development. High-quality early childhood programs and services remain out of reach for most families. The President's proposal to expand access to and the quality of early childhood programs and services for children from birth through age 3 is critically important. In addition to a greater investment in affordable, quality child care, the proposal would also expand opportunities for very young children through Early Head Start-Child Care partnerships. At the same time, it is important to increase investments in the Child Care & Development Block Grant to help families with low and moderate incomes with the cost of care and to help providers meet and sustain standards of high-quality, as well as to extend and expand the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting program.

### Prekindergarten:

Preschool remains costly and of insufficient quality for many young children. Community providers struggle to hire and retain teachers with specialized knowledge and credentials because they lack the resources to make salaries of preschool teachers comparable to those in public schools, even though the teachers have the same degrees and credentials. Most states have provided some financing of prekindergarten access, however they vary greatly from state to state in the standards, the hours of services, and the financial resources to meet high-quality standards.

The President's prekindergarten proposal proposes a new federal-state cost sharing partnership to expand high-quality prekindergarten. These funds should be available to child care, Head Start, and school settings that can meet research and evidence-based standards for quality, including appropriate ratios and class size, developmentally appropriate curricula and teaching practices, teachers with early childhood education credentials, family engagement, and comprehensive

services for children who need them. Funding should help programs meet and sustain standards of high quality, including help to receive higher credentials and degrees and compensation parity between community-based and school providers. Child assessments should be used to improve instruction and services, and should not be used for inappropriate high-stakes uses at the state, local, or program level, as noted by reports of the National Research Council. Child care assistance also must be available to meet the needs of families work schedules that are longer than a school day and for summer periods.

## Kindergarten and the Early Grades:

The early grades of school, including kindergarten, must apply the research of child development as well, including appropriate standards for children across all domains of cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development, teachers with appropriate credentials for children in those grades, supportive services for children who need them, and family engagement practices. The components of quality—standards, professional development, teacher credentials, "ready schools"—are outlined in the Continuum of Learning Act that would amend the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which builds upon successful experiences in the years before school.

#### Resources:

NAEYC Early Childhood Program Accreditation standards for centers and schools serving children from birth through kindergarten are used by programs as a mark of quality, and in many states are linked to higher reimbursement rates for providers. Available at <a href="http://www.naeyc.org/academy/primary/standardsintro">http://www.naeyc.org/academy/primary/standardsintro</a>

NAEYC Standards for Early Childhood Professional Preparation are used to promote high-quality teaching in preparation programs and ongoing professional development. Available at <a href="http://www.naeyc.org/ncate/standards">http://www.naeyc.org/ncate/standards</a>

National Research Council's report, *Early Childhood Assessment: Why, What, How* (2008). Available at http://www.nap.edu/openbook.php?record\_id=12446

NAEYC guide to policymakers, *Developing Kindergarten Readiness and Other Large-Scale Assessment Systems* (2011). Available at <a href="http://www.naeyc.org/resources/research/kreadinessassessment">http://www.naeyc.org/resources/research/kreadinessassessment</a>

Continuum of Learning Act re-introduced in 113<sup>th</sup> Congress as H.R. 791 by Representatives Polis (D-CO) and Young (R-AK)