

January 25, 2010

The Honorable Arne Duncan
Secretary
U. S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20202

Re: *National School Boards Association Recommendations - Early Learning and Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act—January 25, 2010*

Dear Secretary Duncan:

The National School Boards Association (NSBA) representing over 95,000 local school board members across the nation through our state school boards associations is pleased to submit recommendations to the U. S. Department of Education regarding early learning and reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

NSBA applauds the substantive and sustained support by the Obama Administration for early childhood initiatives. Inter-agency collaboration between the departments of Education, Health & Human Services, Agriculture and Housing and Urban Development set the stage for seamless and comprehensive services and support for children, from birth through age 5. Proposed new funding streams, such as the Early Learning Challenge Fund, create an unprecedented opportunity to improve access to high quality care and education from birth to Kindergarten entry.

School board members recognize the critical role that quality early childhood education programs play in helping to set a positive trajectory for student success. Since 2006 NSBA and its Center for Public Education have collaborated with the Pew Charitable Trusts/Pre-K Now to engage school boards in support of high quality, voluntary pre-kindergarten education. We work in close partnership with state school boards associations to promote greater access to voluntary, high-quality pre-kindergarten programs in the belief that such programs will propel schools' efforts to raise student achievement and close achievement gaps.

School districts can offer immense expertise in the process of expanding access to high quality early learning. The experience of school districts in establishing and implementing standards-based reforms and accountability systems can be invaluable as states develop standards for early learning programs, assess effectiveness, provide professional development and technical assistance in order to improve academic outcomes for young children. Elementary education can likewise learn from early education providers and stakeholders how to meet the needs of children as they enter the system.

In addition, public schools, led by local school boards by and from the community, are well positioned to collaborate with early education providers to expand access to high quality early education. The collaborative potential of public education and early learning was illustrated in the *2009 Phi Delta Kappa/ Gallup Poll* on attitudes toward public education. The poll revealed strong support for early education – particularly in public schools. In fact, five out of ten Americans



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believe preschool programs should be housed in public schools, with parents even more supportive of the idea.

This is just one model for collaboration – there are many other options for establishing strong community partnerships. A common element among them is 1) respect for the variance in local circumstances and 2) respect for local authority to address them. Therefore, NSBA makes the following recommendations for early learning in the ESEA reauthorization to capture the collaborative potential of local school districts and early childhood education and strengthen the learning continuum from birth to grade 12:

- (a) Create a new grant program, supported by a separate funding stream, to help states and communities develop, expand, coordinate and enhance the quality and availability of voluntary preschool programs and increase the overall federal investment in education.
- (b) Encourage and provide incentives for coordination of developmentally appropriate, evidence-based innovations and instruction from birth to grade 12, especially in key areas such as early literacy and math, and provide adequate funding for implementation.
- (c) Incorporate collaboration and inclusive decision making at the federal, state and local level between K-12, early education providers and a broad range of community stakeholders to facilitate transitions from pre-K to Kindergarten, improve school readiness, and contribute to student success.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit these recommendations. Questions concerning our recommendations may be directed to Lucy Gettman, director of federal programs, at 703.838.6763; or by email, lgettman@nsba.org.

Sincerely,



Michael A. Resnick
Associate Executive Director

MAR: lg/kc