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**Testimony before the
House Budget Committee, U.S. Congress**

**“Building a Foundation for Families:
Fighting Hunger, Investing in Children”**

February 12, 2009

Congressman Spratt, Congressman Ryan, members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to testify on this important topic. Although the committee is considering the full array of programs to help disadvantaged children, I have focused my prepared remarks on efforts to close the achievement gap through early childhood programs.

Because I understand that the other witnesses will make the case for investing in young children (something that I strongly agree with in theory), I will discuss what I see as the underlying question before you: *How to invest in preschool programs so that they have a reasonable chance of being a success, or, to borrow a phrase from the investment world, so that they do not go sour?* That is the real challenge before you, and the nation.

Because my time is short, I decided to put my testimony in the form of a series of questions and at least partial answers. Also, although there has been a tendency to speak about the goal of “universal preschool,” I will address only programs for low-income children because their needs are greatest.

Many of the points I make below are discussed in greater detail in “Giving Head Start a Fresh Start” in *Handbook of Families and Poverty*, eds. Russell Crane and Tim Heaton (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007).

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1. Is there a serious achievement gap between low-income and more fortunate children, and should it be a matter of government concern?

Yes. On a host of important developmental measures, a large and troubling gap exists between low-income children and more fortunate children. This gap, commonly called the “achievement gap,” but really much more multi-dimensional, curtails the life choices, employment opportunities, and earnings potential of large numbers of children, especially African Americans, Latinos, and other disadvantaged minorities.

Regardless of what causes the gap, government should be concerned about its impact on the children and families involved as well as on the larger society. Government’s response, however, should be guided by a full and accurate understanding of what causes the gap and what can be done about it.

2. What is the cause of the achievement gap, and can a preschool program reduce it?

The achievement gap has many causes, from the poverty stemming from a history of discrimination and curtailed opportunity to the child-rearing styles of many disadvantaged families—with cause and effect intermingled in multiple and controversial ways. The plain fact is that the family is the primary teacher of young children—and compensatory programs face a much larger challenge than the advocates’ rhetoric commonly suggests.

The argument that preschool programs “work” stems largely from the widely trumpeted results of two small and richly funded experimental programs from forty and thirty years ago: the Perry Preschool Project, and, later, the Abecedarian Project. They cost at least \$15,000 per child per year in 2007 dollars (unless otherwise indicated, all dollar amounts are in 2007 dollars), often involved multiple years of services, had well-trained teachers, and instructed parents on effective child rearing. These programs are more accurately seen as hothouse programs that, in total, served fewer than 200 children. Significantly, they tended to serve low-IQ children or children with low-IQ parents.

As you may know, I have been a critic of too easy assertions that Head Start, pre-K, and other early childhood education programs can reverse such deep-seated developmental deficits. Many of the studies that are used to support this line of argument are, simply put, not methodologically sound. Furthermore, most advocates tend to ignore the many studies that show these programs have little effect on children. For example, most objective observers have labeled the results of the Head Start Impact Study “disappointing.” If this study is to be believed, Head Start simply fails in its mission to help prepare students for school.¹

¹See U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, *Head Start Impact Study: First Year Findings* (Washington, DC: IHHS, June 2005).

For four-year-olds (half the program), statistically significant gains were detected in only six of thirty measures of social and cognitive development and family functioning (itself a statistically suspect result). Of these six measures, only three measures—the Woodcock Johnson Letter-Word Identification test, the Spelling test and the Letter Naming Task—directly test cognitive skills and show a slight improvement in one of three major predictors of later

I point this out not because I am hostile to the idea of Head Start—far from it—but because it hurts me to see a program so important to disadvantaged children not be successful.

That’s why the findings of recent studies are so heartening. Both “Project Upgrade” (funded by U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and evaluated by Abt Associates) and “Early Reading First” (funded by the Department of Education and evaluated by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.) used the most rigorous techniques—and they both show that a properly or narrowly focused early childhood intervention can make a significant improvement in at least some elements of the cognitive development of disadvantaged children. (The same seems to be true for a number of state preschool or pre-K evaluations.)

But those four words—“properly or narrowly focused”—hint at how complicated and politically controversial the next steps will be. Many experts in child development have successfully argued that there should be less direct cognitive-oriented instruction and that there should be more play-oriented and discovering/learning activities. Yet, according to Nicholas Zill, former director of Child and Family Studies at Westat, Inc., “the latest research evidence indicates that direct assessments of cognitive skills at kindergarten entrance are predictive of both early and later achievement, into the later grades of elementary school and beyond.”² In fact, the most successful interventions tend to use specific curricula that focus on building particular cognitive skills (such as reading, vocabulary, and math). Unfortunately, even these “successful” models do not make a policy-significant improvement in other areas of child development—and many tend to ignore the child’s social development.

Let me be as clear as possible here: *I read the research literature to say that preschool programs can probably make a marked improvement in the lives of disadvantaged children, but that we have only a partial idea of how they should be organized and managed, that is, brought to scale. As of now, there is no actual model of preschool services that has been proven successful in closing the achievement gap, and any additional funding should be used to create a flexible system that can change—and improve—as more knowledge is accumulated.*

3. Should funding for early care and education be expanded, and if so, for whom?

reading ability (letter identification). Head Start four-year-olds were able to name about two more letters than their non-Head Start counterparts, but they did not show any significant gains on much more important measures such as early math learning, vocabulary, oral comprehension (more indicative of later reading comprehension), motivation to learn, or social competencies, including the ability to interact with peers and teachers.

Results were somewhat better for three-year-olds, with statistically significant gains on fourteen out of thirty measures; however, the measures that showed the most improvement tended to be superficial as well. Head Start three-year-olds were able to identify one and a half more letters and they showed a small, statistically significant gain in vocabulary. However, they came only 8 percent closer to the national norm in vocabulary tests—a very small relative gain—and showed no improvement in oral comprehension, phonological awareness, or early math skills.

For both age groups, the actual gains were in limited areas and disappointingly small. Some commentators have expressed the hope that these effects will lead to later increases in school achievement; however, based on past research, it does not seem likely that they will do so.

²Nicholas Zill, e-mail message to Douglas Besharov, May 3, 2006.

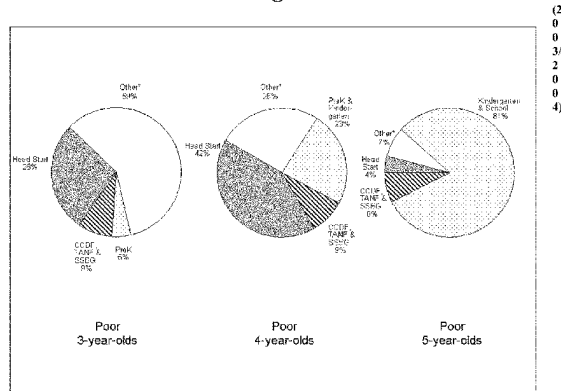
As asked (and answered), this question usually assumes that most poor children do not now receive early child care or education. But that is not quite correct, and an accurate answer to this question requires an understanding of current patterns of child care and early education. That is not as simple as one might think because of the overlap among various programs and the lack of a centralized program database.

We have created such a database, with financial support from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (Child Care Bureau and Head Start Bureau), the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) (at Rutgers University), and the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Our Early Education/Child Care (“ee/cc”) Model is essentially an Excel-based model of current child care and early education program spending and enrollment. According to our model, which has been widely vetted, in the 2003/2004 school year:

- about 88 percent of *poor five-year-olds* were in kindergarten or another school or preschool program;
- about 74 percent of *poor four-year-olds* were in either Head Start (about 43 percent); a prekindergarten/preschool program (about 23 percent); or a full-time, subsidized child care program under the Child Care and Development Fund (about 9 percent);
- about 41 percent of *poor three-year-olds* were in either Head Start (about 28 percent); a prekindergarten/preschool program (about 5 percent); or a full-time, subsidized child care program under the Child Care and Development Fund (about 9 percent); and
- much lower proportions of *poor children under age three* were in such programs.

(See figure 1 and table 1.)

Figure 1
Combined Coverage of Poor Children
in Head Start and Other (Unduplicated)
Arrangements



Sources: Author's calculations described in text.

Note: "Other" represents the remainder of Head Start-eligible children who are not in Head Start; prekindergarten; kindergarten; school; or full-time, subsidized care. Thus, the children in the "Other" category are in, but not limited to, the following arrangements: free, full-time care by the child's relative (when not subsidized); part-time, subsidized care; and any unduplicated children in child care funded through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, through Title I of the Elementary and

Hence, the question is not simply whether funding for preschool programs should be increased, but, just as important, how any new funding should be spent within the context of existing services.

4. What are the options available to Congress for expanding child care and early childhood education programs?

The decision Congress makes about how to expand early care and education programs is complicated by the fact that three largely separate and independent programs uneasily coexist in most communities. Each has major strengths and weaknesses, and any expansion effort should try to rationalize their currently uncoordinated operations.

1. Enrich child care programs by encouraging or requiring the use of curricula with a proven ability to raise achievement. An increasing number of low-income mothers have jobs, especially since welfare reform. According to the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), in 2002, about 19 percent of poor mothers of four-year-olds worked full-time, and about 16 percent worked part-time. For three-year-olds, the respective figures were both about 17 percent.³ As a result, enrollments in child care programs have increased substantially, and Head Start no longer enjoys the dominant place in the constellation of federal child care and early childhood education programs.

As late as the 1980s and early 1990s, Head Start was by far the largest early childhood program, amounting to over 40 percent of all federal and related-state spending in some years. But by 2005, however, Head Start had fallen to only about 33 percent of total federal and related state spending,⁴ largely because of increases in child care funding associated with welfare reform and the expansion of prekindergarten/preschool programs. (Between 1997 and 2005, for example, spending under the four of the major child care and early education programs—the Child Care and Development Fund, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, the Child and Adult Care Food Program, and the Social Services Block Grant—rose about 95 percent, from about \$7.64 billion to about \$14.91 billion, compared to only about a 41 percent rise for Head Start, from about \$5.14 billion to about \$7.26 billion.)⁵ Spending on prekindergarten/preschool programs rose during this period, from an estimated \$997 million during the 1991/1992 school year to about \$3.02 billion during the 2004/2005 school year.⁶ (No figure for 1997 is available.) (See figure 2 and table 2.)

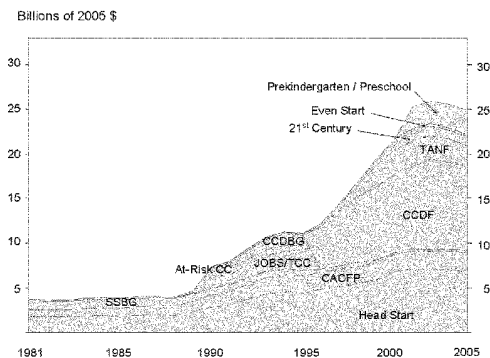
³Authors' calculation based on U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation 2001 Panel Wave 4, from data files downloaded at <http://www.bls.census.gov/sippftp.html#sipp> (accessed February 1, 2005).

⁴Douglas J. Besharov, Caeli A. Higney, and Justus A. Myers, "Federal and State Child Care Expenditures (1997–2005): Child Care Spending Falls as Pre-K Spending Rises" (College Park, MD: University of Maryland, Welfare Reform Academy, 2007), available from: <http://www.welfareacademy.org/pubs/childcare/childcarespending060907.pdf> (accessed January 26, 2007).

⁵Douglas J. Besharov, Caeli A. Higney, and Justus A. Myers, "Federal and State Child Care Expenditures (1997–2005): Child Care Spending Falls as Pre-K Spending Rises" (College Park, MD: University of Maryland, Welfare Reform Academy, 2007), available from: <http://www.welfareacademy.org/pubs/childcare/childcarespending060907.pdf> (accessed January 26, 2007).

⁶The National Institute for Early Education Research, *The State of Preschool: 2005 State Preschool Yearbook*.

Figure 2
Child Care Spending
Federal and State
 (1981–2005)



Sources: Douglas J. Besharov, Caeli A. Higney, and Justus A. Myers. "Federal and State Child Care Expenditures, 1997–2005: Child Care Spending Falls as Pre-K Spending Rises" (College Park, MD: University of Maryland, Welfare Reform Academy, 2006), <http://www.welfareacademy.org/pubs/childcare/childcarespending060907.pdf> (accessed January 26, 2007); and W. Steven Barnett, Jason T. Hustedt, Laura E. Hawkinson, Kenneth B. Robin. *The State of Preschool Yearbook* (New Brunswick, NJ: NIEER, various years), <http://nieer.org/docs/index.php?DocID=131> (accessed July 18, 2007). No consecutive data on prekindergarten/preschool spending are available for the school years prior to 2001/2002.

For many years, it was said that the nation had to make a trade-off between high-quality but expensive programs like Head Start and lower quality child care programs designed to help low-income mothers who have jobs. Recent research efforts such as "Project Upgrade" and "Early Reading First" strongly suggest that, at modest additional cost, child care programs can be more effective than Head Start in narrowing key elements of the achievement gap. This would have the advantage of being the least expensive option (see table 2), but would not deal with the children in Head Start nor those with parents who are not working. It would be an incomplete solution, at best.

Moreover, despite the recent extremely promising evaluations of focused curricula, many child care specialists think that making a meaningful improvement in the quality of child care would require much more money and a high level of regulation. There is also some reluctance to embrace curricula that focus on cognitive achievement at the cost of social development. Most important, without addressing Head Start's problems, this strategy would not address the needs of the much larger number of children in that program.

2. *Improve Head Start's services so that it does a better job closing the achievement gap and expand its hours of operation to meet the needs of working mothers.* This would have the advantage of building on an existing nationwide network of federally funded programs focused on poor children. But besides Head Start's disappointing impacts on child development, reorienting it to serve the growing number of children whose mothers have jobs would be a major and severely disruptive undertaking.

It would also be very expensive. (See table 2.) Head Start is already the most expensive form of early intervention. By our estimate, the basic, part-day program costs about \$6,156 per child per year. Expanding Head Start to full-time, full-year would bring costs to about \$22,618 per child—and that would not address Head Start's apparent inability to meet the developmental needs of poor children. Moreover, if the past is any guide, the Head Start community would oppose such moves and, instead, press for the program to serve younger children and higher-income children without changing its approach to early childhood educational services.

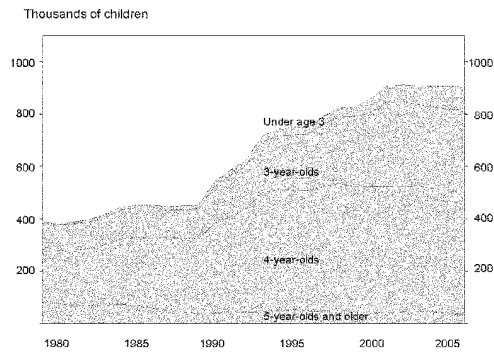
It is worth noting that private foundations, state policy-makers, and parents have decided against the Head Start option. Many liberal foundations have already shifted their support away from Head Start and toward the expansion of preschool or prekindergarten ("pre-K") services—which siphon off hundreds of thousands of children from Head Start programs. Many states have likewise begun funding expanded prekindergarten programs, again at Head Start's expense.

Perhaps the best indication of Head Start's slumping reputation comes from low-income parents themselves, who often choose not to place their children in Head Start. One can see this in the declining proportional enrollment of four-year-olds, Head Start's prime age group. Between 1997 and 2006, even as the number of poor four-year-olds increased and as Head Start's funded enrollment increased by about 15 percent (about 115,000 children), almost all of this increase in enrollment went to three-year-olds and to Early Head Start. In those eight years:

- the number of enrolled four-year-olds *decreased by about 3 percent*, from 476,285 to 463,693;
- the number of enrolled five-year-olds *decreased by about 24 percent*, from 47,629 to 36,368;
- but the number of enrolled three-year-olds *increased by about 33 percent*, from 238,143 to 318,220;
- the number of children in Early Head Start *increased by about 186 percent*, from 31,752 to 90,920; and
- the number of children enrolled in Head Start for two or more years *increased by about 55 percent* or about 100,000 children (from about 180,000 to about 280,000).

(See figure 3.)

Figure 3
**The Age of Head Start Children
 (1979–2006)**



Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Head Start Bureau, "Head Start Fact Sheet," various years (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, various years). No data are available for the years prior to 1979.

3. *Expand state prekindergarten and preschool programs.* The new prekindergarten/preschool programs for low-income children established in many communities seem to be enormously popular. State spending on these largely state-funded prekindergarten/preschool programs, which serve mostly low-income children,⁷ increased greatly over the last decade and a half. Comparing estimates from the Children's Defense Fund and from the NIEER, it appears that state spending on these programs about tripled between the 1991/1992 and 2004/2005 school years, going from about \$997 million⁸ to about \$3.02 billion.⁹

School-based prekindergarten programs, alone, now enroll more children (of all incomes) than Head Start, and at their current growth rate, will soon be the dominant early childhood education program for low-income children. According to the U.S. Department of Education,

⁷The National Institute for Early Education Research, *The State of Preschool: 2004 State Preschool Yearbook*, stating: "Most states targeted their programs to low-income children and children with other background factors that place them at risk for starting school behind their peers."

⁸Karen Schulman, Helen Blank, and Danielle Ewen, *Seeds of Success: State Prekindergarten Initiatives 1998–1999* (Washington, DC: Children's Defense Fund, 1999), p.31.

⁹W. Steven Barnett and Kenneth B. Robin, "How Much Does Quality Preschool Cost?" (working paper, National Institute for Early Education Research, 2006), <http://nieer.org/resources/research/CostOfEffectivePreschool.pdf> (accessed March 9, 2007).

total prekindergarten enrollment (of all ages and incomes) has more than tripled since the early 1990s, rising from 303,000 in 1990/1991 to 637,000 in 1995/1996, to 776,000 in 2000/2001, and to 950,000 in 2003/2004.¹⁰ (By 2005/2006, it had risen to 1,036,000.)¹¹

The expansion of these programs has, however, been uneven. According to the NIEER, in 2006/2007, 14 states had 25 percent or more of all four-year-olds in pre-K, and only three states had more than 50 percent (Florida at 57 percent, Georgia at 53 percent, and Oklahoma at 68 percent). Georgia's universal program, for example, operates five days per week for at least 6.5 hours per day. During the 2006/2007 school year, the program spent about \$310 million and served over 75,000 four-year-olds (covering about 53 percent of all four-year-olds, and about 27 percent of all three- and four-year-olds), resulting in an average per child cost of about \$4,111.¹²

¹⁰There are two major sources of data for prekindergarten enrollment figures: the Department of Education's Common Core of Education and Private School Universe Survey and the National Institute of Early Education Research's (NIEER) State Preschool Yearbook. The Common Core data consist of administrative data collected from state education departments and includes data specific to each elementary school, secondary school, and school district in the United States. The Common Core defines "prekindergarten students" as the number of students "enrolled in a group or class that is part of a public school program, and is taught the year or years preceding kindergarten." U.S. Department of Education, "CCD – Build a Table: Glossary," <http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/bat/glossary.asp?letter=P>, accessed November 18, 2008; and U.S. Department of Education, "CCD – What is the CCD?" <http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/aboutCCD.asp> accessed November 19, 2008.

NIEER, on the other hand, collects state data directly from state prekindergarten administrators as opposed to state education departments and uses a narrower definition of "prekindergarten program," with extensive criteria about such characteristics as educational components, funding streams, and schedules. NIEER's data also includes children in state-funded prekindergarten programs that are in non-public school settings. W. Steven Barnett, National Institute of Early Education Research, telephonic communication with author, November 12, 2008; and W. Steven Barnett et al., *State Preschool Yearbook, 2003–2007* (New Brunswick, NJ: NIEER, 2003–2007), <http://nieer.org/docs/index.php?DocID=131> (accessed November 4, 2008).

These differing methodologies for collecting data and in defining prekindergarten programs result in differing estimates of prekindergarten enrollment. For example, for the 2005/2006 school year (the latest available year), the Common Core reported prekindergarten enrollment of about 1,036,000 compared to NIEER's enrollment count of about 942,000. In addition, the enrollment trends have differed in the last three years, with the Common Core reporting slower growth in prekindergarten enrollment than NIEER, which may be explained by states exhausting available space in public schools for prekindergarten programs and increasingly turning to non-public school settings to provide prekindergarten. Ultimately, we use the Common Core administrative data for our prekindergarten estimates as they seem the most reliable. However, they do not include children enrolled in non-public school prekindergarten programs making our coverage rate estimates for prekindergarten programs somewhat conservative. U.S. Department of Education, "Common Core of Data – Build a Table," <http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/bat/>, accessed October 3, 2008; W. Steven Barnett, National Institute of Early Education Research, telephonic communication with author, November 12, 2008; and W. Steven Barnett et al., *State Preschool Yearbook, 2003–2007* (New Brunswick, NJ: NIEER, 2003–2007), <http://nieer.org/docs/index.php?DocID=131> (accessed November 4, 2008).

¹¹U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics: 2007* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, March 2008), table 36, http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d07/tables/dt07_036.asp?referrer=report (accessed September 26, 2008).

¹²W. Steven Barnett, Jason T. Hustedt, Allison H. Friedman, Judi Stevenson Boyd, and Pat Ainsworth *The State of Preschool 2007 State Preschool Yearbook* (New Brunswick, NJ: NIEER, 2007), <http://nieer.org/yearbook/pdf/yearbook.pdf> (accessed November 4, 2008).

Other states focus on disadvantaged children. For example, since 1998, New Jersey's Abbott prekindergarten/preschool program has been offered to all three- and four-year-olds in the "highest poverty districts" (defined as "districts where at least 40% of children qualify for free or reduced-price lunch receive funding").¹³ In the 2006/2007 school year, about 15 percent of all New Jersey three-year-olds and 25 percent of all four-year-olds were enrolled in pre-K.¹⁴

In the 2006/2007 school year, twelve states had no program at all.¹⁵ Some state programs were quite small. Nebraska's, for example, covered only about 1,600 children at a cost of about \$3.7 million.¹⁶

Why the apparent preference for prekindergarten programs? Perhaps parents find them more attractive than Head Start because of their seeming universality. Although most pre-K programs are directed to low-income children, they generally serve children from families with incomes as high as 185 percent of the poverty line.¹⁷ Or perhaps it is because parents deem pre-K programs to be superior, especially since they are usually in school buildings and staffed by better educated teachers. Certainly, the few evaluations of these programs suggest that they are substantially more successful than Head Start.

In any event, judging from the growth in enrollments, expanding preschool programs is apparently the most popular option available to Congress. Doing so, however, would not provide assistance to low-income children under age four, and would also be expensive if expanded to cover the full-time care needed by the children of working mothers. (The NIEER estimates the cost to be about \$14,879 per child.)

Moreover, these pre-K programs are unlikely to have a meaningful impact on the most distressed children and families—who need earlier and more intense intervention.

¹³W. Steven Barnett, Jason T. Hustedt, Allison H. Friedman, Judi Stevenson Boyd, and Pat Ainsworth *The State of Preschool 2007 State Preschool Yearbook* (New Brunswick, NJ: NIEER, 2007), <http://nieer.org/yearbook/pdf/yearbook.pdf> (accessed November 4, 2008), p. 94.

¹⁴W. Steven Barnett, Jason T. Hustedt, Allison H. Friedman, Judi Stevenson Boyd, and Pat Ainsworth *The State of Preschool 2007 State Preschool Yearbook* (New Brunswick, NJ: NIEER, 2007), <http://nieer.org/yearbook/pdf/yearbook.pdf> (accessed November 4, 2008).

¹⁵The states offering no prekindergarten/preschool program were Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, Indiana, Mississippi, Montana, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming. See, W. Steven Barnett, Jason T. Hustedt, Allison H. Friedman, Judi Stevenson Boyd, and Pat Ainsworth *The State of Preschool 2007 State Preschool Yearbook* (New Brunswick, NJ: NIEER, 2007), <http://nieer.org/yearbook/pdf/yearbook.pdf> (accessed November 4, 2008).

¹⁶W. Steven Barnett, Jason T. Hustedt, Allison H. Friedman, Judi Stevenson Boyd, and Pat Ainsworth *The State of Preschool 2007 State Preschool Yearbook* (New Brunswick, NJ: NIEER, 2007), <http://nieer.org/yearbook/pdf/yearbook.pdf> (accessed November 4, 2008).

¹⁷W. Steven Barnett, Jason T. Hustedt, Kenneth B. Robin, and Karen L. Schulman. *The State of Preschool: 2003 State Preschool Yearbook* (New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research, 2003).

5. What should Congress do?

To be successful, any expansion of early childhood education programs should (1) build on—but also rationalize—these three key programs and (2) allow them to change over time as needs change and as experience and research suggests programmatic shifts.

Rationalizing the three key early education programs starts with the understanding that we should not have a one-size-fits-all approach to early childhood education. Head Start, for example, tries to do too much for some children—and too little for others. Despite the conventional rhetoric, not all poor children have the cognitive and developmental problems that prompted Head Start's creation. Many poor children do not need the array of support services provided by Head Start and, based on the evidence, do just fine in regular child care when their mothers work. Children from the most troubled families (usually headed by young, single mothers), however, need much more than the program currently provides.

Hence, at the risk of being wildly impractical, I would suggest an approach that recognizes the differing needs of low-income children:

- (1) *Child care programs.* A strong commitment to early childhood education should be added to child care programs funded under the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF). This program is largely and successfully operated through a voucher system to parents. Although this should not change, a systematic and on-going effort at both the federal and state levels to identify effective curricula and program approaches (such as those described above) could be the basis of professional and parental education and, hence, wide-scale program improvement.
- (2) *Pre-K and other preschool programs.* As described above, these programs have grown dramatically; they already enroll more children than Head Start. Because these programs are largely state-funded, the first question one might ask is whether the federal government should become involved at all. But that is probably a naive question. Even those states already spending money on preschool programs will be eager for federal assistance, despite the possibility of more federal oversight.

My concerns are two-fold. First, it is not clear how most preschool programs will be integrated into full-time child care arrangements for the children of working mothers. At present, they seem to require the same kinds of awkward “wrap-around” services as Head Start. Second, most of these programs have been established in public schools and it is not clear to me whether we want to create another education monopoly. Why not give parents the right to select the preschool program of their choice? (As mentioned above, the CCDF operates largely on that principle.) That would also encourage the creation of flexible programs that meet the varying needs of working mothers.

- (3) *Head Start.* The current Head Start model is just not sufficient, in terms of both its services and curriculum. It generally consists of only four hours a day of classroom instruction (some grantees provide more), for less than nine months. And, despite Head

Start's claims about "parent involvement," there seem to be no systematic efforts to include parents in the program or to give parents better child-rearing skills.

The best thing would be for Head Start to go back to its roots, to search for ways to make a meaningful improvement in the lives of the poorest, most disadvantaged children. It might, for example, provide services to unwed teenagers that start during their first pregnancy. Focusing on the most in need, the new Head Start would be truly two-generational, that is, with real services for parents (not just the current lip service to parent involvement), and it would bring to bear all the programmatic services that have developed since Head Start was first conceived—the Women, Infants, and Children program (WIC), Medicaid, the Maternal and Child Health Services Block Grant program, the Community and Migrant Health Center Program, and the Title X program, which seeks to reduce unintended pregnancy by providing contraceptive and related reproductive health care services to low-income women.

Before closing, I want to emphasize what I hope has been my clear theme: A strong case can be made for expanded early childhood education services, but only in the context of program flexibility (enhanced by vouchers) and systematic and rigorous research and evaluation. We have so much more to learn.

Congress should mandate a systematic program of research and experimentation, one that tries and evaluates different approaches to see what works best. We simply do not have a scientifically tested knowledge base about which approaches work—and for whom. Needed is a methodologically rigorous inquiry into the comparative effectiveness of various curricula and program elements, such as full-day versus part-day and one- versus two-year programs, traditional nine-month versus full-year programs, classroom size (paralleling work on class size done at the elementary level), the training or formal education of teachers, and effective ways of helping parents do a better job meeting their children's needs. Most important, distinctions among children from different family backgrounds and with different degrees of need will be crucial.

Such a multifaceted research and development effort could be patterned after the new one for K-12 education established under the No Child Left Behind legislation. That effort enjoys a \$400 million annual budget, compared to only \$20 million for Head Start research. A tripling of Head Start's research budget would be a good start. If no new money is available, Congress could reallocate some of the funds now designated for quality improvements (especially since about half of these funds go to raise the salaries of Head Start staff, already among the highest in the early childhood education world).

Conducting such an inquiry will require substantial intellectual and political effort—because of the turf battles it would trigger, the scientific challenges involved in designing so many multi-site experiments, and the sustained monitoring and management needed. Nevertheless, without an effort on this scale and without such intellectual clarity, it is difficult to see how better approaches to child care and early childhood education can be developed.

Table 1
Combined Coverage of Poor Children
in Head Start and Other (Unduplicated) Arrangements
 (At enrollment, 2003/2004)

Age	Total poor children	Nonpoor children in Head Start	Poor children in Head Start		Poor children in preschool, prekindergarten, and school		Poor children in full-time, subsidized child care		Total combined coverage of poor children
	Number	Number	Number	Coverage	Number	Coverage	Number	Coverage	
3	819,000	90,285	225,767	28%	37,074	5%	71,492	9%	41%
4	812,000	135,045	337,696	42%	186,635	23%	71,492	9%	74%
5	727,000	12,382	30,962	4%	586,710	81%	54,994	8%	93%
3-5	2,358,000	237,711	594,424	25%	810,419	35%	197,977	8%	68%

Sources: Total poor children: U.S. Census Bureau, "Single Year of Age—Poverty Status: 2004," *2004 CPS Annual Social and Economic Supplement* (Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005), http://pubdb3.census.gov/macro/032005/pov/new34_100_01.htm, accessed October 3, 2008; Head Start: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Head Start Bureau, *Head Start Program Information Report (PIR) for the 2003-2004 Program Year* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, undated); Prekindergarten and school: U.S. Department of Education, "Common Core of Data—Build a Table," available from: <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/data/>, accessed October 3, 2008; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Private School Universe Survey*, "Table 23. Number of private school students, by program emphasis and grade: United States," <http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/pss/tables/0304.asp>; U.S. Census Bureau, "School Enrollment—Social and Economic Characteristics of Students: October 2003, Detailed tables" table 2, "Single Grade of Enrollment and High School Graduation Status for People 3 Years Old and Over, by Age (Single Years for 3 to 24 Years), Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin: October 2003" (Washington: U.S. Department of Commerce, 2005); Child care: University of Maryland, Welfare Reform Academy, "Early Education and Child Care (ee/cc) Model," 2007.

Table 2
**Cost Comparisons: Head Start, Early Head Start, CCDF Child Care,
 and Prekindergarten/Preschool**
 (2003/2004)

Cost	Head Start		CCDF		Pre-K/ Preschool
	Ages 3-5 (HS)	Ages 0-2 (Early HS)	Ages 3-5 Center	Family	Ages 3-4
Average per child (regardless of hrs)					
Head Start Bureau estimate	\$7,927	\$7,927			
Besharov/Myers estimate	\$10,297	\$17,561	\$8,891	\$7,930	
NIEER estimate					\$3,770
Part-day and full-day sessions					
Besharov/Myers estimate (part-day)	\$6,156				
Besharov/Myers estimate (full-day)	\$13,797				
Hourly (across all durations)	\$9.87	\$11.21	\$4.59	\$4.18	n/a
Hourly (full-time)	\$9.23	\$11.16	\$3.86	\$3.46	\$6.07
Hourly (part-time)	\$11.54	\$13.95	\$4.88	\$4.35	n/a
Full-time, full-year (50 hours/week, 49 weeks/year)	\$22,618	\$27,335	\$9,457	\$8,462	\$14,879

Source: Douglas J. Besharov, Justus A. Myers, and Jeffrey S. Morrow, "Costs Per Child for Early Childhood Education and Care: Comparing Head Start, CCDF Child Care, and Prekindergarten/Preschool Programs (2003/2004)," (June 22, 2007).