

FORUM ON EARLY LEARNING: INVESTING IN OUR CHILDREN, INVESTING IN OUR FUTURE

HEARING

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR, AND PENSIONS UNITED STATES SENATE

ONE HUNDRED SEVENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

ON

EXAMINING THE QUALITY OF EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING PRO-
GRAMS, FOCUSING ON THE IMPORTANCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD
COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

JANUARY 24, 2002

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THURSDAY, JANUARY 24, 2002

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR, AND PENSIONS,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, in Room SR-325, Russell Senate Office Building, Senator Kennedy (chairman of the committee) presiding.

Present: Senators Kennedy, Dodd, Harkin, Mikulski, Reed, Clinton, Gregg, Frist, Enzi, Hutchinson, Warner, Bond, and Sessions.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR KENNEDY

The CHAIRMAN. Good morning. We welcome the opportunity to welcome a very special person at a very special forum that we are holding on early education.

All of the members of this committee, Mrs. Bush, remember so well at the opening of this forum today another time when you were gracious enough to be willing to share your concerns and knowledge and interest and ideas with us. That was on September 11th, and all of us are mindful of that day and the extraordinary tragedy that impacted this country, and we are also mindful of your entrance into this room with my colleague and friend Judd Gregg to address the American people without all the real knowledge that we would have only a few minutes later about the great challenge that this Nation would face.

I, and I think all of America, was impressed by your strength and calm and elegance and the way that you were able to give assurance and inspiration to the American people. These are certainly qualities which all Americans associate with you and now with your husband, leading the fight against terrorism around the world. We have that as a thought and as a memory.

I think many of us have other memories as well—your extraordinary work on reading, which has been an inspiration to so many parents, reminding parents all over this country of the value of reading with their children, and we have been inspired by your willingness to work with us in Congress and most of all with parents and people in local communities in terms of how we can provide enrichment to children.

We are very much aware of all the science of recent times that shows the potential and the possibilities of children learning at the earliest ages, at the time of the development of the brain. This is something that you understood intuitively and instinctively, and

we are very much interested in hearing from you, but most of all, we want to just express our very warm sense of appreciation for your presence here and for your continued leadership for parents and families in this country and helping us to understand how children can learn and what we might be able to do to help and assist those families.

So we are enormously grateful for your willingness to join us here, and I will now ask my colleagues if they would like to say a word of welcome to our distinguished guest.

Senator Gregg.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR GREGG

Senator GREGG. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for holding this hearing. And thank you, Mrs. Bush, for being willing to participate.

As the chairman has mentioned, the last meeting was a poignant one and one which is etched in all of our memories as one of those points in our lives that we will never forget. And certainly your activities during that time make me recall the statement of I suspect one of your favorite authors, or certainly one of the books that was most taken out of your library, and that was Ernest Hemingway, who defined courage as "grace under fire." Certainly your serenity and grace during this very difficult time has been a beacon of strength for our Nation, and we very much appreciate it.

Your leadership on this issue, which is to try to make sure that parents understand the importance of early education and teaching the alphabet and the sounds of the alphabet to their children long before they get into school, is absolutely critical, because that sort of highlighting of that very important element of education, which is the need for a children to learn early how to read, is essential if we are going to have effective school systems, because kids have to be ready to learn when they get to school. You truly understand that, and we thank you for taking that leadership role and thank you for taking the time to come to this committee.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Dodd.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR DODD

Senator DODD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and welcome, Mrs. Bush, to our committee.

I just want to echo the comments of my two colleagues, both to you and to your husband, for your wonderful leadership over these past several months.

On a personal note, I want to thank you for the nice books that you sent to my new arrival and daughter, Grace, personally noted by the President and you as well. We will cherish those, and I will make sure she does not actually use those books for a few years; I am afraid of what they might look like, as I am told by others who have young children. But we are deeply appreciative of your thoughtfulness.

And again, I thank you for being so involved in this early learning issue and thank you for coming back again today to discuss this issue with us.

This is about as critical an issue as this country faces. We talk about the security of the Nation and all the steps that we are taking at home, the homeland security issues, and obviously doing what we can internationally, but in the very long-term as a free society, it will be issues like this that in the long view of history will determine the strength of our country, with young children growing up with the ability to learn and to maximize their potential.

We are joined here today by Secretary Paige, who has been a wonderful leader in education; and Eunice Shriver, who is with us in the audience today, who has been a remarkable advocate for so many years for young children and families and just gave me a good lecture about zero to 3. She said, "You make sure that you are with that child of yours from zero to 3," and she is absolutely correct.

So we are delighted to hear your testimony today.

Mr. Chairman, I know that we are not going to hear from the second group of panelists—we were planning 2 days of hearings—from people like Ed Zigler, whom I know you know very well, and Dr. Shonkoff. I might ask at the appropriate time, Mr. Chairman, that their testimonies be included as part of today's record so that we have the benefit of what they would have said on September 11 as well.

So I thank you for that and welcome you again to the committee.

[The prepared statements of Messrs. Zigler and Shonkoff follow:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF EDWARD ZIGLER, PH.D., STERLING PROFESSOR OF PSYCHOLOGY, YALE UNIVERSITY, HEAD, PSYCHOLOGY SECTION, YALE CHILD STUDY CENTER, AND DIRECTOR, BUSH CENTER IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL POLICY

It is an honor to be invited back to the Senate, and to share my expertise with this committee. I am the Sterling Professor of Psychology at Yale University. I also head the Psychology Section of the Yale Child Study Center and direct the Bush Center in Child Development and Social Policy. I have authored some 30 books and over 600 scholarly papers, the majority dealing with topics pertinent to children's development and learning. In the area of social policy, I have worked with every administration, both Republican and Democrat, since Lyndon Johnson. I served in Washington during the Nixon Administration as the first director of what is now the Administration on Children, Youth and Families, and as Chief of the United States Children's Bureau. I was one of the planners of our nation's Head Start program and a recent spin off, Early Head Start. Over the program's 36 years, I have become known as both its best friend and its most vocal critic.

Of late there have been criticisms that Head Start is not doing a very good job teaching literacy to its young students. I will offer my suggestions on that point in a moment. First, let me state that I concur that the ability to read is absolutely essential for an individual to have a successful life. I therefore applaud President and Mrs. Bush for the impetus they have provided to assure that every child in America will be a successful reader. However, as someone who has studied the growth and development of children for some 45 years, it is my responsibility to point out that reading is just one aspect of cognitive development, and that cognitive development is just one aspect of human development. Cognitive skills are of course very important, but they are so intertwined with the physical, social, and emotional systems that it is myopic, if not futile, to dwell on the intellect and exclude its partners.

Think about what goes into literacy. Yes, it involves mastery of the alphabet, phonemes, and other basic word skills. But a prerequisite to achieving mastery is good physical health. The child who is frequently absent from school because of illness, or who has vision or hearing problems, will have a difficult time learning to read. So will children who suffer emotional troubles such as depression, attention deficits, or post traumatic stress disorder. And think about motivation. A child's curiosity and belief that he or she can succeed are just as important to reading as knowing

the alphabet. Phonemic instruction by the most qualified teacher will do little for a child who suffers from hunger, abuse, or a sense of inferiority.

I am urging that we broaden our approach to literacy by focusing on the whole child. We must also broaden our understanding of when and where literacy begins. I've heard a lot of preschool-teacher bashing lately, but in reality, literacy begins much earlier than age four. It begins with the thousands of loving interactions with parents after an infant is born. It begins as a child develops a sense of self-worth by realizing that his or her accomplishments, whether they be learning to roll over or to recite the alphabet, are important to significant others. It begins with sitting in a safe lap, hearing a familiar bedtime story. Eventually the child will want to emulate the parent and read too. Reading, then, begins with meeting the child's physical, social, and emotional needs, followed by exposure to more formal literacy skills.

This broader view was recently endorsed in the wonderful new book, *From Neurons to Neighborhoods*, where the finest child development thinkers in the country pointed out the importance of emotional and motivational factors in human development. This statement corrected a short-coming of my field for the past 50 years—namely an emphasis on cognitive development to the exclusion of personality and motives, which are so central to the burgeoning new discipline of emotional intelligence. The President is correct in his recent championing of the child's character. Piece by piece, then, the President is discovering the whole child—recognition that has been one of the great strengths of our nation's Head Start program.

Head Start is an early education program, but it is also a physical and mental health program. It is dedicated to involving the parents, who, after all, will have a greater influence on the child's learning than any other source. The new Early Head Start program in fact emphasizes parent-child interactions, the very place where literacy begins. Senator Kennedy realized the importance of the years zero to three some time ago and was the one who made Early Head Start a reality. Since then, it has grown from 17 sites to over 600.

You have all heard recent reports that children are graduating from Head Start with few prereading skills. Yet a sizeable literature shows that they are ready for school, and even the recent FACES evaluation of Head Start shows good progress, including literacy, in kindergarten. Do I believe that Head Start should do more to promote literacy? Most definitely. The new performance standards are moving the program toward more defined curricula with specific goals for literacy and related skills. But Head Start needs the resources to carry out these plans. If we want well-trained teachers who can implement sound educational programs that send children on their way to reading, we simply have to pay them more than poverty level wages. And if we want to draw more low-income parents into their children's learning, we need to expand Early Head Start.

Shoring up the quality of Head Start can have an impact far beyond its target population. Head Start is a model program whose success in promoting school readiness has fed the movement toward universal preschool. Head Start quality standards are beginning to filter to child care settings. A lot of research has shown that most child care in this nation is poor to mediocre. Yet millions of infants and toddlers—the very ages when literacy begins—are spending their days in such places.

In sum, if we want a nation of readers, we have to look beyond teaching phonics. We have to look at the whole child, the parents, and at all of the people and experiences that make up the child's early learning environment.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JACK P. SHONKOFF, M.D., DEAN, THE HELLER SCHOOL FOR SOCIAL POLICY AND MANAGEMENT, AND SAMUEL F. AND ROSE B. GINGOLD PROFESSOR OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL POLICY, BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY, WALTHAM, MA

My name is Jack Shonkoff. I am the Dean of the Heller School for Social Policy and Management and Gingold Professor of Human Development and Social Policy at Brandeis University. I am also a Board-certified pediatrician with two decades of practical experience in the delivery of health care and early childhood intervention services who had the privilege of serving as Chair of the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine Committee that produced the recently released report entitled, *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*.

I would like to begin by thanking Senator Kennedy and this distinguished Committee for focusing the nation's attention on the health and development of our youngest children. I also would like to acknowledge the support of The First Lady, Laura Bush, who testified before this Committee three weeks ago, and underscore the importance of a bipartisan approach to this critical national interest.

I speak with you this morning, not as an advocate or provider of services, but as the chair of a committee of scientists who conducted a critical analysis of current knowledge about early childhood development, and whose conclusions and recommendations were subjected to the rigorous review of the National Academy of Sciences. The unimpeachable integrity of this distinguished institution and the credibility of its endorsement should not be underestimated.

In the spirit of brevity, I offer four core conclusions from the NRC/IOM report. These are not based on my personal opinion. This is cutting-edge science.

Human development is determined by both nature and nurture. Molecular biologists at the forefront of the Human Genome Project and leading behavioral scientists agree that each of us is the product of both a unique genetic endowment and the influence of our personal life experiences. For young children, beginning at birth, the question is not whether early experience matters, but rather how early experiences shape individual development.

The essential features of the environment that influence children's development are their relationships with the most important people in their lives. When these relationships provide love, stability, security, responsive interaction, and encouragement of exploration and learning, children thrive. When these relationships are unstable, neglectful, abusive, or disrupted by significant life stresses such as economic hardship, substance abuse, or serious mental illness, the consequences can be severe and long lasting. Children's early development is influenced most significantly by the health and wellbeing of their parents. It is also affected by the quality of their relationships with the other important people in their lives, who increasingly include non-family providers of early care and education. Together these relationships define the cultural context within which core values are transmitted from one generation to the next.

The early emergence of intelligence, emotional regulation, and social skills are highly inter-related and the development of competence in each is closely intertwined with the others. Starting from birth, children are remarkably inquisitive explorers who experience a range of powerful emotions. Before their first birthday, they can feel the exhilaration of mastering a challenging task as well as the deep and lasting sadness that builds in response to trauma, loss, or early personal rejection. As their brains mature, their ability to master new skills grows and these emerging learning abilities are linked closely to their capacity to regulate their feelings and control their own behavior.

Early childhood programs that deliver carefully designed services by well-trained staff can have significant positive impacts on young children with a wide range of developmental difficulties, but interventions that work are rarely simple, inexpensive, or easy to implement. There are no magic bullets or quick fixes for addressing the complexities of human development. Poorly designed interventions delivered by inadequately trained providers are unlikely to produce significant benefits. In contrast, state-of-the-art services that are funded sufficiently are a wise public investment that is likely to return both short-term developmental dividends and long-term human capital gains.

Stated simply, although the politics of early childhood are complicated, the needs of young children are relatively straightforward and the messages from the scientific community are clear:

- All aspects of human development are influenced by both the genes we inherit and the environment in which we live.
- Human relationships are the "active ingredients" of environmental influence on child development.
- How children feel is as important as how they think, particularly as it affects their readiness to meet the challenges of school.
- Developmental pathways can be influenced positively by effective parenting and supportive environments, and early problems can be treated effectively, but the success of early childhood intervention services depends on the quality of their implementation and the knowledge and skills of those who provide them.

When our public policies dismiss or ignore the science of early childhood development, we miss an opportunity to address the underlying roots of many important national concerns. Let me offer a few examples:

- How can the recently enacted No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 emphasize the need for stronger performance standards and financial incentives to attract bright and highly motivated teachers, while we simultaneously tolerate large percentages of inadequately trained and poorly compensated providers of early child care and education who have an important influence on the foundations of school readiness?
- Why do we measure the success of welfare reform primarily in terms of labor force participation when large numbers of working mothers with young children are still living under the poverty level, and recent research indicates that poverty in the

first five years may be a stronger predictor of not completing high school than is poverty in middle childhood or adolescence?

- How can we reconcile our national concern about reducing violent crime with the fact that we know how to treat very young children who have been abused or exposed to family violence, yet most of these emotionally traumatized children receive little or no professional mental health services?

- Why do we focus public debate on the relative merits of alternative investment options for the Social Security trust fund and not also address the compelling question of how best to invest in the young children whose future productivity will be essential to the continued viability of the Social Security system “as we know it?”

Over the past few decades, there have been marked changes in the nature, schedule, and amount of work engaged in by parents of young children, and greater difficulty balancing workplace and family responsibilities for parents at all income levels. At the same time, growing numbers of young children are spending considerable time in child care settings of highly variable quality, some of which pose real threats to their health and development. In 1999, the National Household Education Survey reported that 61 percent of children under age 4 were in regularly scheduled child care, including 44 percent of infants under 1 year.

The knowledge needed for informed policies to promote the well-being of all our nation’s children has been gained from nearly half a century of considerable public investment in early childhood research. Although the science is growing at an increasingly rapid pace, the gap between what we know and what we do is unacceptably wide. Let me offer a few examples of what could be done to narrow that gap:

- If we really want to enhance children’s readiness for school, then we must pay as much attention to the development of their social and emotional competence as we do to their cognitive and linguistic abilities. The current emphasis on early literacy, which should be supported, will not achieve its full impact if early childhood professionals are not prepared to help the many young children whose learning is compromised by limited attention, aggressive behavior, anxiety, depression, or difficulty making or sustaining relationships. Knowing the alphabet on your first day of school is not enough if you can’t sit still or control your temper in the classroom.

- If we really want to support families and enhance child well-being, then we must promote healthy relationships between young children and the adults who raise them. If we really want to strengthen those relationships, then we must find a way to create more viable choices for working mothers—by developing politically and economically feasible mechanisms to provide both paid parental leave for those who wish to stay at home with their young children and affordable, quality care and early education for the children of those who return to work.

- If we really want to reduce disparities in school readiness based on social class, then we must promote real partnerships among federal, state, and local governments to create more unified and effective systems of services, from birth to school entry. Current early childhood programs were established in a piecemeal fashion over time—and their variable quality and persistent fragmentation result in a confusing array of services for families, marked inefficiencies in the use of public and private resources, a difficult environment for assuring accountability and assessing impacts, and significant inequalities in access to programs that are most effective, leading to a highly uneven playing field for America’s youngest children well before they begin school.

- If we really want to secure the economic and political future of our nation, then we must enhance the value of our investments in early childhood programs by increasing the knowledge, skills, and compensation of those who provide these services. An education agenda that neglects the professional development of those who influence the foundation that is built in the first 5 years of life ignores the science of learning, and assures that many children will be left behind before they have a chance to start.

Most children successfully master the challenges of growing up in a wide range of circumstances. A significant number do not. Most of those who experience difficulties along the way are helped to get back on track by the skilled guidance of their parents and other adults who care for them. A highly vulnerable subgroup exhibits serious and persistent problems that require specialized intervention.

The NRC/IOM report, *From Neurons to Neighborhoods*, calls for “a new national dialogue focused on rethinking the meaning of both shared responsibility for children and strategic investment in their future.” In its concluding thoughts, the report states:

The time has come to stop blaming parents, communities, business, and government—and to shape a shared agenda to ensure both a rewarding childhood and a promising future for all children.

There is a compelling need for more constructive dialogue between those who support massive public investments in early childhood services and those who question their cost and ask whether they really make a difference. Both perspectives have merit. Advocates of earlier and more intervention have an obligation to measure their impacts and costs. Skeptics, in turn, must acknowledge the massive scientific evidence that early childhood development is influenced by the environments in which children live. (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2000. pp. 414-15)

I applaud the efforts of this Committee, under your leadership, Senator Kennedy, to focus the nation's attention on our youngest children and their families, and I welcome the opportunity to answer any questions that you may have. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Frist.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR FRIST

Senator FRIST. Mr. Chairman, I know that we need to be very brief, but I want to extend my welcome to the First Lady as well.

The father of modern rocketry, Robert Goddard, once said: "It is difficult to say what is impossible, for the dream of yesterday is the hope of today and the reality of tomorrow." I think about that quotation, because to me it demonstrates where we are along a time line, and to have your leadership and you taking the initiative on early education and the direction and importance it plays in this overall evolution, in truth, going from hopes and dreams to reality, is something that we all very, very much appreciate.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much.

Senator Mikulski.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR MIKULSKI

Senator MIKULSKI. Thank you.

Good morning, Mrs. Bush. It is wonderful to see you again.

I just want to take this opportunity to commend you for your leadership and your ongoing steadfastness in the advocacy for children in this Nation and to be sure that their achievements do not depend on the wealth of the ZIP code they live in or their ethnic heritage or whatever disability life might have brought them.

We made a good start in our elementary and secondary education reforms, and I think the committee is very proud of that. Now, we want to be able to build on that, and I know of your advocacy that we need to start early and start often.

We both know that children start school at different levels. Some start kindergarten already knowing their letters, and some with far more disadvantage. That is why we are looking forward to hearing from you this morning, to hear your ideas and recommendations on Head Start and Early Head Start.

You are a librarian; I am a social worker. My first job out of graduate school in social work was working at a Head Start program as a social worker. Those children are now in their late thirties and early forties. They have gone on, finished school, some have gone on to college. They have all built lives and built communities, because it was not only about school, it was about services—early detection and screening, making sure they were reading-ready, making sure they could hear or did they need eyeglasses, and what support services to bring their parents into this.

So as one social worker to a sister librarian, I look forward to working with you, because I think we both know that, as in public life, it is not how many hands we shake but how many lives we touch.

I look forward to collaborating with you.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Enzi.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR ENZI

Senator ENZI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I too want to welcome the First Lady to her first appearance before this committee. I do remember that you almost had an appearance before, and I wound up being evacuated from the building along with you. At that time, we were hoping to have the education bill finished, and at this point we have the bill finished.

I thank you for your dedication and the focus and the experience that you lent to your husband and to us so that we might be able to get that bill finished. We thank you for all of your experience in education and look forward to hearing from you today.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Enzi.

Senator Wellstone.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR WELLSTONE

Senator WELLSTONE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I also welcome the First Lady. I think this is an especially critical time, and we really need your leadership. I do not remember the statistics, and I should have written them down, but I think we are still covering only about half the children who are eligible for Head Start, and I think in Early Head Start, it is under 5 percent, or 10 percent at best. And on the whole child care picture, I think that barely 10 percent of low-income families are really able to participate; the parents or parent cannot afford child care, especially good child care, which I know you are very committed to.

So I thank the First Lady. My experience has been that all of us—everybody—are for the children, especially the small children. They are all under 4 feet tall, they are all beautiful, and we should be nice to them. The problem is that we are all for them except when it comes to digging into our pockets and investing the resources that will really make this happen so that every child can reach his or her potential, and I think that your voice will be extremely important. I think we have to live up to the words that we speak.

I thank you for being here.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Wellstone.

Senator Hutchinson.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR HUTCHINSON

Senator HUTCHINSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mrs. Bush, thank you for coming today. I think all Americans will remember where they were on September 11, but I think it is very striking that you were dealing with education and your husband, our President, was in Florida, reading in an elementary school. That reflects your mutual commitment to education reform

and education improvement in this country, and I applaud you for that.

I think it is also wonderful and impressive that in the midst of the ongoing war on terrorism, the President could accomplish and, with the help of this committee and the Congress, achieve his number one domestic agenda item in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the No Child Left Behind Act.

We look forward to moving to the next phase and thank you for being here today. We applaud what you are doing.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Hutchinson.
Senator Reed.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR REED

Senator REED. Mrs. Bush, I want to thank you and commend you for your gracious and courageous presence in the White House and particularly thank you for your leadership on literacy. Because of you, I think, principally, and your efforts, we were able not only to pass the legislation to improve literacy training, but we also have some resources to buy library books for school libraries. I thank you for that effort.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Reed.
Senator Bond.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR BOND

Senator BOND. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mrs. Bush, we welcome you here, and we thank you for your emphasis on early childhood education.

We all know that research has shown that the earliest years are the most critical development period in a child's learning ability, the development of the brain, sensation and experiences. I was shocked to find out that half of the mature learning intelligence of a child develops by the age of 3.

We know that parents and families are really key to this development. Early positive interaction with parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles plays a critical role.

In Missouri, we are known as "the show me State," and we have had the great good fortune to be shown that a program that we have in Missouri called Parents As Teachers really does work. It is an operation of early childhood development that educates parents, empowers them to help give their youngest children a good start in life. The program teaches parents how to do the best job of being their first teacher, and it puts the responsibility on the parent.

Now, we have a lot of independent studies that show how successful PAT is, but I can tell you from personal testimony from hundreds of Missourians that it is working. Expanding that to become a Statewide program in Missouri is probably my proudest accomplishment as Governor. Now, 150,000 families voluntarily participate. They serve 200,000 children a year, and these children have a much better start because they have had active involvement of their parents.

I look forward to working with you on early childhood development. I know that your Ready to Read, Ready to Learn initiative is very important. I hope that we can offer assistance and perhaps have an opportunity to show you how Parents As Teachers works.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Bond.
Senator Clinton.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR CLINTON

Senator CLINTON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I join in welcoming you, Mrs. Bush. We are delighted that you are here. I also want to thank you for everything you have done since September 11 to reassure our Nation's parents and children to help so many who I am sure were having a great deal of difficulty understanding what was happening around them to be able to get through this time.

The President's leadership on behalf of the State of New York and the commitment to rebuilding New York City is something that we are very, very grateful for.

While much has changed since September 11, I think the fact that you are here today demonstrates clearly that we still have work to do and that there is not any more important task ahead of us than to prepare our children. I applaud your lifelong dedication to that task, and I particularly thank you for the White House conference that you held last year to try to bring even more attention to what we now know from scientific research about the way children learn.

We do have a lot of good information; now we just have to put it to work. So your being here today gives new emphasis to the task before us to make sure that we do provide the opportunity for every child to live up to his or her God-given potential.

I look forward to working with you, and I thank you very much for this commitment.

Mrs. BUSH. Thank you very much.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Clinton.
Senator Sessions.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR SESSIONS

Senator SESSIONS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Mrs. Bush, for being with us. I agree with Senator Clinton that you showed real leadership in reaching out to children in the wake of September 11. I know that that came from your experience as a teacher working with children.

My wife has taught for a number of years, I have taught, and a lot of my good friends are teachers, and we talk about those issues a lot.

I know that you care about reading. I visited 11 schools in Alabama over the past week, and a lot of good things are happening. Teachers are teaching their hearts out. They are working every day and making progress in a lot of areas.

I noticed that in one school that has adopted an Alabama Reading Initiative, Mr. Chairman, we more than doubled the funds in our bill that we passed. Alabama was spending \$11 million on this

reading initiative that Massachusetts and Florida are studying, and it is working exceptionally well. It doubled what the State is going to be able to spend on that. One teacher who used the program told me that no child was more than one grade behind in their school.

For those who have experience in education, you know that that is unusual. So I think there are a lot of positive things happening out there, and I thank you for your leadership and look forward to continuing to work with you.

Mrs. BUSH. Thank you very much.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Sessions.

We are honored to have you with us, Mrs. Bush. I also join in welcoming Secretary Paige. We are all very grateful for his continued and ongoing important leadership in education, and we thank him for being here as well.

Mrs. Bush, we look forward to hearing from you.

STATEMENT OF FIRST LADY LAURA BUSH

Mrs. BUSH. Thank you all very much, Senator Kennedy, Senator Gregg, all the members of this committee. I thank you very much for your very warm welcome.

I also want to recognize Secretary Rod Paige. He has been a school superintendent in one of the larger school districts in the United States, and that is really when you are on the front line, when you work as a school superintendent. I am so thrilled that he has joined my husband's administration with his expertise.

So thank you very much, Secretary Paige.

I also want to recognize Eunice Kennedy Shriver. Thank you for coming, and thank you for your work over all these years with children with special problems and for your work with the Special Olympics.

On September 11, I came here to meet with all of you to talk about the development and education of our young children. That meeting, of course, as we all know, was canceled, or called off, because of the tragedies that struck the innocent victims at the World Trade Center Towers, the Pentagon, and those on Flight 93.

September 11 was a turning point for all of us—as parents, as neighbors, as Americans. I will never forget the moments that Senator Kennedy and Senator Gregg and I shared privately before we met the media in this very room. And I will always remember that you were not concerned for yourselves, but rather, you were concerned for others; you were concerned for my husband, for the people of our country, and the victims of the attacks and their families.

Yet when we came in here to make our public statements, you were resolute in announcing that this briefing was merely being postponed—not canceled. In the face of the tragedy, you remained focused on the children of America, and for that, I applaud you and all the members of this august committee.

Since September 11, I have traveled across the country meeting children and their parents. I have seen the faces of children who were directly affected by the attacks—children who lost their parents in the Pennsylvania crash, children who were displaced from

their schools in New York, students who lost classmates in the airplane that struck the Pentagon.

As a result, I am doubly committed to using my voice to help give our youngest Americans a real chance to succeed in the classroom, in the university, and in the workplace. I am proud to be your partner in this effort to make sure that children's learning skills are nurtured during the critical years between the crib and the classroom.

When President Bush was sworn into office 1 year ago, he vowed to make sure that every child was educated and that education was his top domestic priority. He committed to work to close the achievement gap among students.

Thanks to the leadership of Senator Kennedy, Senator Gregg, and all the members of this committee, on January 8, President Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, an historic piece of legislation that sets high standards and holds schools accountable for student results.

This comprehensive plan will improve overall student performance and help close the achievement gap that exists in our Nation's schools.

In 2002, programs in the elementary and secondary reform bill received a 27 percent increase in funding, including an 18 percent increase in Title I and a boost to nearly \$1 billion for early reading programs.

Soon, my husband will propose a budget that even further funds critical education programs. His proposal will include major increases for education and special education, including an increase of \$1 billion in funding for Title I programs for disadvantaged students.

The President's new budget will also ask for \$1 billion in additional funding to help children with special needs. Thanks to the reforms included in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, we can be sure that taxpayer dollars are spent wisely. I am proud to be part of President's Bush's efforts to improve the quality of education for all children.

Last February, I launched an initiative called Ready to Read, Ready to Learn. This initiative has two major goals—first, to ensure that all young children are ready to read and learn when they enter their first classroom; and second, to help our Nation recruit the best and the brightest to become teachers, especially in classrooms in our most impoverished neighborhoods. I am dedicated to ensuring that all young children are ready to read and learn upon school entry.

My emphasis on making sure that preschool children are provided stimulating activities and interactions with adults and other children so they can develop strong language and pre-reading concepts from birth onward stems from my own experiences as a mother, a public school teacher, and a school librarian.

As a mother, I learned quickly that reading to our daughters and playing language games—even when they were babies—brought joy and laughter to our home. As they grew physically, they also grew in their love of being read to and then reading themselves.

My husband and I must have read "Hop on Pop" to them dozens of times, and it was not uncommon for them to ask me to read the

same book several times a day. It was astonishing to watch how many new words they learned as we read and talked about words and their meanings, the names of the letters and the sounds that letters make.

Before I knew it, they could “read” many words in “Hop on Pop” and other books. Well, actually, they memorized those words, because we read them so often. But the important thing is that they thought they were reading. Even by 2 years of age, they knew when the book was right-side up, and they knew that we always started to read on the left side of the page.

As they continued to grow, they became fascinated with different ways that we could play with words and sounds, and they delighted in hearing nursery rhymes, stories, and songs. Before they entered kindergarten, they knew that the letters and words in books talked to you just like people do.

When our girls entered school, they were well on their way to independent reading, and their love for reading was firmly established. Little did I know at that time how all of our reading activities from their birth onward provided the foundation for their later reading skills.

During my career as an elementary school teacher, I was fortunate to focus a great deal of time on a love of mine, which was interacting with young children around books and reading. In fact, story time and reading instruction was my favorite time of the day, and I was constantly thrilled at how reading opened up new worlds for the children and sparked their imaginations.

However, this was also a time when I observed that some children were having difficulty learning to read. It was troubling to watch these little ones struggle with print, but it was even more troubling to see how embarrassed and frustrated they were by their failure to do what they saw other children do. It was as if their self-esteem and confidence took a blow every time they tried to read.

For many of these children, I could see that they did not feel comfortable in school—it was not a place that they wanted to be—and I noticed that they began to avoid reading. Later, as a librarian, I also noticed that some teachers held lower expectations for these children even though many were very bright and quite adept at other skills.

Many of these children were having difficulties learning to read because they had not developed the basic building blocks of language during their pre-reading skills—the building blocks that are forged through language play, lap-time reading, bedtime stories, and the conversations about the characters and the situations that the stories brought to life.

Why was this basic foundation missing? In some cases, the children’s parents had not learned to read themselves and could not read to their children. In some cases, limited income meant no books in the home. In some cases, parents’ work schedules simply precluded any routine conversation, language play, or interactions with books if they were available.

In yet other cases, parents and caregivers simply did not know the importance of reading to and engaging their children in word play. As a result, their children were less exposed to language.

Some children may have had learning problems, making learning to read difficult.

In short, I saw firsthand that many children simply did not have the early opportunities that help them develop a love for language and reading. And I learned that not having those opportunities can have devastating effects on children's success in school. I realized that for many children, being left behind did not begin in elementary school—it began in the years between diapers and the first backpacks.

I also realized that something had to be done. There simply is no excuse for any of our youngest and most vulnerable children to be forced to climb uphill just as they enter school. It is a tough enough transition as it is. No matter what their circumstances of birth, we have to strive to level the playing field for those youngsters born into conditions that limit their opportunities to develop and learn.

Over the years, I have been blessed to be surrounded by people who are passionate about education. My parents nurtured my love of reading before I started school. Mrs. Gnagy, my second-grade teacher, inspired me to become a teacher; my inlaws, who even in retirement promote strong schools and literacy programs; and of course, my husband, who shares our fellow Texan, Phylliss Hunter's, philosophy that reading is the new civil right.

Last July, I convened a White House Summit on Early Childhood Cognitive Development at Georgetown University. Many experts and practitioners came together to help us understand how to help all of our children become ready to read and ready to learn. I am delighted that Senator Kennedy participated in the Summit and inspired us with his dedication to this issue.

My specific purpose in convening the summit was to develop a clear understanding of what parents, grandparents, early childhood teachers, child care providers, and other caregivers can systematically do to provide children with rich and rewarding early learning experiences during a period of development that is marked by extraordinary growth and change.

I asked the participants to focus on early cognitive development with an emphasis on the development of early language and pre-reading abilities. I wanted to make sure that all of us understood how these skills, or their absence, affect a child's later ability to read and thus succeed in school.

While my focus is on early language and pre-reading development, I do not want to minimize the importance of nutrition and physical development or the development of feelings, behavior, or social skills. To address early cognitive development, including language and literacy development, outside the context of social and emotional development would limit the progress that we can make. All of these competencies are intertwined, and each requires focused attention.

But the development of early language and pre-reading skills is not only extraordinarily critical to a child's reading ability and academic success throughout school, as well as his or her occupational success throughout life, the absence of this development has the potential to destroy self-esteem, confidence, and motivation to learn.

The teaching of vocabulary concepts and other language skills and pre-reading skills to include print concepts, letter knowledge and phonological concepts in preschool programs has not been emphasized enough in the past and has not received the critical attention it needs.

Why? Many early childhood educators and parents have thought that early learning was primarily maturational and that preschool children were not “developmentally ready” to learn about letters, sounds, writing, numbers, vocabulary concepts or other sophisticated content.

Conventional wisdom has been that it is best to wait to encourage young children to read, count, and learn abstract concepts because they will get enough of that in school. The idea has been that teaching this type of content too early may interfere with the motivation to learn once the children arrive in school.

But we have learned that this is not the case. The infant brain actually seeks out and acquires a tremendous amount of information about language in the first year of life. Even before babies can speak, they have already figured out many of the components of language. They know which particular sounds their language uses, what sounds can be combined to create words, and the tempo and rhythm of words and phrases.

Why is this information important? Because developmental science has taught us that there is a strong correlation between early language development and reading. Language and reading require the same types of sound analysis. The better babies are at distinguishing the building blocks of speech at 6 months, the better they will be at other more complex language skills at 2 and 3 years of age, and the easier it will be for them at 4 and 5 years old to grasp the idea of how sounds link to letters.

Preschool cognitive abilities, including language and pre-reading abilities, can predict school success and school completion. For example, reading scores in the 9th grade can be predicted with surprising accuracy from a child’s knowledge of the alphabet in kindergarten.

Children need help learning these concepts. They do not develop naturally. A child will not learn the name of the letter “A”, the sound the letter “A” makes, or how to print it simply by being with adults who know these things or by being with adults who read a great deal for pleasure. Children learn these critical concepts because adults take the time and effort to teach them in an exciting, engaging, and interactive manner.

This does not mean that preschool children should be taught using the same methods and materials that are used with first and second-graders. The challenge for the parent, the grandparent, the preschool teacher, or the child care provider is to develop fun, educational language activities that also engage and develop children’s interests, social competencies, and emotional health. All of these goals can be joined and met, but there must be a clear and equal emphasis on building cognitive skills.

Every expert who participated in the White House Summit on Early Childhood Cognitive Development stressed that reading is the keystone for academic and life success. A failure to learn to

read not only leads to failure in school but portends failure throughout life.

Not only are children humiliated emotionally and socially in school because of this failure, but they are unable to learn about the wonders of science, mathematics, literature, and other subjects because they cannot read grade-level text. By high school, the student who cannot read has almost no dream of attending college and can only look forward to meager occupational choices.

It is no wonder that 10 to 15 percent of poor readers drop out of school. And with their limited options, they are more than twice as likely as successful students to be unemployed after dropping out, to be arrested, or to engage in substance abuse.

Reading failure pushes beyond school failure and occupational hardships. Without sufficient reading skills, a person cannot read a prescription, decipher a warning label, or keep up with the news.

Reading failure does not just constitute an educational issue—it reflects a significant public health problem. And with great anguish, we note that parents who cannot read cannot engage their own children in reading activities.

During our summit, we learned that there are effective early language and cognitive development strategies that can be used at home and in preschool that can ensure that many children at risk of failure now can enter their first classroom ready to read and ready to learn.

We can begin to disseminate and implement the principles applied in these strategies as quickly as possible through our colleges and universities, our professional organizations, libraries, and research programs.

The best scientific knowledge about “what works” is only effective when it is provided in an informed manner. The early childhood field needs better curricula that do a better job of helping young children with their pre-reading and language skills.

President Bush has asked Secretary Rod Paige and Secretary Tommy Thompson to convene a task force on early childhood development to identify priorities for research to address these critical issues. A team of scientists and educators from the National Institutes of Health, the Department of Education, and the Department of Health and Human Services is moving forward with plans to produce materials that will help parents, preschool and child care programs know more about enhancing cognitive development. They will also identify and conduct the research necessary to close critical knowledge gaps. Secretaries Paige and Thompson will share their findings with all of you as well.

In closing, I want to thank you for the opportunity to discuss these important issues with you today. They are national issues that affect the heart and soul of our people. Education has always been important to our Nation, but since September 11, we appreciate its importance even more, because we want America to always be the land of opportunity and to have the kind of internal strength that comes from every child and every citizen having a great education.

From day one, the education that we provide our children will shape the way they think and learn. The quality of their education will either drive or stifle the enthusiasm, motivation, and effort

that they bring to learning, the way they interact with others, and their ability to adapt to their successes and failures throughout life. We are embarking on a most noble mission to help their journey become as fulfilling and as productive as possible. This is their birthright.

I appreciate your inviting me here today, Senator Kennedy. I commend your efforts and those of Senator Gregg and all the committee members to ensure that all children have a strong language and pre-reading foundation before they board their first school bus.

I look forward to our work on behalf of America's youngest children. Together, we will ensure that no child is left behind.

Thank you all very much.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much for an excellent statement, Mrs. Bush.

Before we ask questions, I know that you are under time pressure, and under the arrangements made, I have just a few questions, and Senator Gregg will ask some questions, too.

I notice that Senator Harkin has arrived and would like to extend a word of welcome to him and recognize him at this time.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR HARKIN

Senator HARKIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to welcome our First Lady. I thought it was a very eloquent statement, especially when you mentioned that "for many children, being left behind did not begin in elementary school—it began in the years between diapers and backpacks."

In 1991, the Research and Policy Committee of the Committee for Economic Development issued a report under President Bush, the first President Bush, and their summary of that entire study said this: "We must understand that education begins at birth and that preparation for education begins even before birth."

So I really applaud what you said and your focus on early childhood education. I just think that we spend so much time and money in this country patching and fixing and mending later on, and if we could just do what you are focusing on and focus on those early years, we will not have to be patching and fixing and mending later on.

So I applaud you for it; continue your great leadership in this area.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mrs. BUSH. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much.

Senator Warner has joined us as well.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR WARNER

Senator WARNER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mrs. Bush, it is a privilege to have you here in this famous room in the U.S. Senate, presenting a case that in a way is understood by the American public in simple, direct language. I have found in over a quarter-century in public life that the most important word is "credibility." You bring that.

Mrs. BUSH. Thank you.

Senator WARNER. In the jargon of America: "Been there, done that." You have been a teacher, you have been a librarian, and based on that experience, the public is ready to accept you as a full partner in bringing about their prayers, really, to care for their children.

So I commend the President and yourself, and I will predict that you achieve as few others have in the goals that you have set forth as a First Lady. Good luck.

Mrs. BUSH. Thank you very much.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much, Senator Harkin and Senator Warner.

Mrs. Bush, in your statement, you reemphasized two very lofty goals which I think need constant restatement as guideposts for all of us who are interested in education generally and particularly in early education, and that is that when the child arrives in pre-kindergarten or first grade, he or she will be ready to learn and ready to read as well. Those are two very, very important and worthwhile goals.

As you mentioned, we have just completed with the President's leadership the Leave No Child Behind Education Act. One of the very important aspects of that legislation is having quality teachers in the classrooms all the way from kindergarten and first grade to the 12th grade.

You reference the importance of high-quality individuals working with children from the earliest ages, developing relationships with these children. How do you think we can attract the best and the brightest in our country to be involved and working with our children at the earliest ages and making a difference in their lives?

Mrs. BUSH. I think there are so many ways. Certainly, we can pay teachers more. I think that that is very important. I think we also need to pay attention to the ways that colleges and universities and departments of education educate teachers and prepare them for teaching. We know that colleges and universities pay a lot of attention to their law schools and to their medical schools; it is also critically important that they pay attention to their schools of education.

I am going to be hosting a summit in March on teacher preparation and what we can do as a country to make sure that when teachers get their teacher certificate and enter the school, or when we prepare child care and Head Start teachers in community colleges with their certification, they get a very good education and are literally prepared to teach people to read when they start school.

But I also think that there is something that our whole country can do, and that is to value our teachers. Each of us has a story about a teacher who literally changed our lives, who let us know something about ourselves that we did not know, or who encouraged us in a way that no one else could.

So I hope that all of us will again thank our own children's teachers and that we will encourage young people to choose teaching as a career. It is a very noble career; it is one of the most profound professions. I think it makes a more profound impact on our country than almost any other profession.

I do think there is at least a little bit of anecdotal evidence that young people are choosing teaching again. Seven of my friends' children have gone back to college to get a teaching certificate; they had other degrees. I think that after September 11, when people reassessed their own lives, they looked for ways that they could help, and certainly by being a great teacher, we can affect the lives of so many people.

I think there is a lot for all of us to do in our country to let teachers know how much we value them, and I think that when people realize how noble that profession is, maybe we can attract more of the best and brightest.

The CHAIRMAN. This is an excellent response and an enormously important one. What you are reminding us is that if we want to get the best teachers in K through 12, we are going to have to get the best of those who work with children in the earliest years. It seems to make sense, but I think we need to be reminded of that, because there is an enormous challenge in that area.

Let me ask you about the role that you think we can play. Do you think there is a role for Congress? I think all of us are looking for our appropriate role in trying to help in this area, and I am interested in your general sense and whether you think there is a role for us.

Mrs. BUSH. I definitely think there is a role for Government and for the Congress. Doing things like holding these hearings—every one of us needs to figure out ways that we can inform all of the public—and certainly there is a role for the media in this as well—to inform all of the public of how important it is, how important those very first years are to a child's life and what parents and caregivers and grandparents and babysitters, as well as preschool teachers and Head Start teachers, can do to nurture those very critical language skills early in a child's life.

I think there is a role for all of us, but certainly there is a role for funding for early childhood programs, there is a role for funding for research to learn more about how children actually learn and what we can do about it.

All of us need to play a role in making sure that our very young children are nurtured.

The CHAIRMAN. In your statement on page 4, you say: "While my focus is on early language and pre-reading development, I do not want to minimize the importance of nutrition and physical development or the development of feelings, behavior, and social skills. To address early cognitive development, including language and literacy development, outside of the context of social and emotional development, would limit the progress that we can make. All of these competencies are intertwined, and each requires focused attention."

Mrs. BUSH. And that is absolutely right. One of the goals of Head Start was to supply certain nutritional, social, immunization, and every sort of health benefit that Head Start could provide to very young children.

I have a very favorite Head Start center which is in Dallas, the Margaret Cone Center. Texas Instruments Foundation in Dallas looked around for something to do in Dallas that could help people, and they picked this Head Start center because the neighborhood

that it was located in had the lowest education rate, the highest poverty rate, and the most single parents. So they chose the Margaret Cone Head Start Center, and they augmented the amount of money that each Head Start child in this center had by about \$4,000. They made it full-time, year-around, all day, provided three meals a day, provided a social worker per every few families, and even after 2 years of doing that, when the children entered the public school across the street, they still tested in the lowest 21st percentile on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills.

So the Texas Instruments Foundation realized that there was something missing. They had provided every social and nutritional thing they could provide to these children. So they went to a professor who happened to be at SMU, my alma mater, and she developed a very good curriculum for very young 3- and 4-year-olds. It includes a lot of play, but it is very language-rich.

They trained the teachers—and this is a very important part of it. The teachers were like other Head Start teachers in that they were not certified like elementary and secondary teachers were. But they did do this training with the teachers to incorporate these language-rich activities. And then, after 2 years of being in this Head Start center, when the children started the public school across the street, they tested in the 95th percentile on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. So they realized that the one component that was missing was the component of this curriculum that was very language-rich. And of course, they had to train the teachers to be able to teach this, and that is a very important part.

When we are talking about teachers, teachers need to be trained. Child care providers and Head Start teachers need to be trained in adding these language-rich activities.

When I visited the Margaret Cone Center, some of the children could actually already read, even though they were 4. And now, the Texas Instruments Foundation has about 12 years of research. They have followed these children for the 12 years that they worked with the Margaret Cone Center, so they know how they do later in school. They have now also funded, but only for the last 2 years, the Jerry Junkin Center in Dallas that works with children who have English as a second language. So they just have a little bit of research about what adding these language-rich experiences can do for children.

The CHAIRMAN. That is very instructive and helpful, and we will certainly follow up, because it is a wonderful example that you have referenced.

Finally, from your testimony today and also in reading through your statement at the summit, it seems that you intuitively understand what science has borne out over the last 10 years, that there is some very important potential in terms of early learning in terms of your own children and the value that it has for children. That is something that I think is very clear both from your own statements and from what you have done and in the leadership that you have provided.

Let me finally ask you about the dilemma that we are facing with low-income mothers, particularly those with toddlers, who are facing extraordinary challenges in terms of caring for their children and also in terms of trying to ensure that they will have adequate

care. This presents a dilemma, and I am not really looking for a precise answer as much as your own understanding of the kinds of challenges that poor women have in trying to deal with the balance between providing for their family and working and caring for toddlers. It is really an important challenge and one that has no easy answers.

I would be interested if you have any comments on that.

Mrs. BUSH. That is right. You are right about intuitively knowing. One of the reasons why mothers talk to their babies in that sort of sing-song baby talk intuitively is because that emphasizes language, it emphasizes sound, it emphasizes syllables and patterns of words.

One reason why nursery rhymes have been popular for hundreds of years is because that also emphasizes to children language and rhyme and rhythm. All of those things a lot of people do know intuitively, but not everyone knows it. I think we have to address it in a myriad of ways. The medical community can help. For instance, when mothers or parents bring their children in for their well-baby visits, they can talk to the mothers about how important it is to read to their children. That is a program in a lot of clinics all across the country now with pediatricians, because like we said earlier, not being able to read is also a public health issue, so the medical profession can be involved.

Certainly, libraries can be involved and all of the literacy providers around the country. There was a doctor at Texas Tech University who started the Reach Out and Read Program there, which actually started in Boston with Dr. Zuckerman. First, she thought she would just try prescribing reading to a mother with the very first mother who brought her little boy in. So the mother came in with her little boy, who was there because he was having asthma problems, and my friend, Dr. Bakke, after she worked with the little boy and talked with the mother, wrote out this little prescription and gave it to the mother and said, "This is for you to read with your baby." And the mother whispered, "I cannot read."

So she already knew that that was going to be a part of the problem, and she was able to give this woman a literacy provider in her little West Texas town, which probably had to do either with her school district or her library, so the mother could at least learn to read enough to be able to read her son's asthma medication labels.

So there will be a myriad of ways that we are going to have to try to reach young mothers who are struggling economically, who are struggling to take care of very young children, and all of us have to figure out a way that we can help them. School systems can help, Head Start centers can help, libraries can help, mentors around the country can help, and certainly, Senator Bond talked about Parents As Teachers—all those providers can help. We will have to address that problem in a lot of ways.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much.

Senator Gregg.

Senator GREGG. Thank you for a superb statement that certainly defines the issue and puts on the table a number of ideas that we can use.

I was especially interested in your discussion of the Margaret Cone Center, which is the type of example that I think we can build on here, and I look forward to doing so.

Following up on the last point you were making, do you have thoughts or ideas on what parents can do who do have the skills but maybe are not using them? What should parents be doing?

Mrs. BUSH. I hope one good result out of September 11th is that parents are realizing that no matter how busy they are, they have to make time for their children. I think that what happened on September 11th reinforced for all of us the idea that we might not have as much time as we think we have with our loved ones, and I hope it reinforced for parents how important it is to spend time with their children.

But there are so many things that parents can do, starting with reading to their babies when their babies are 6 months old. All of the things that come out of reading a story with their children—the talk about words, the talk about letters, the talk about sounds, the games that you can play with children to rhyme, the songs that you can sing to children—all of those are critically important, and most people know that intuitively when they are with babies. The peek-a-boo games, all of those little games that parents have played with their children forever, are very critical later to their children's success in life. But parents need to make sure that they do not let weeks and months go by without reading a story to their children. And even when their children start school, when they are in the first and second and third grades, during those first years that they are learning to read, if they do not read a book all summer, if their parents never take them to the library or to the book store if they can afford it in the summer to pick out a book, when that child starts the first week of the second grade or the first week of the third grade, their teacher will have to start over.

Reading takes practice, and it really is incumbent upon every parent to read to their children every, single day if they possibly can. It just takes 5 or 10 minutes—and not only when we put our arms around our children and read to them do we show them that reading is important, but more importantly, we show them that they are important, that they are so important to us that we can spare 5 or 10 minutes a day to put our arms around them and read to them.

Senator GREGG. I cannot think of a stronger statement.

Mrs. BUSH. Thanks.

Senator GREGG. I appreciate your taking the time to come today. I know you are on a tight schedule, and we thank you very much.

Mrs. BUSH. Thank you so much.

Thank you all very, very much, and thank you for having me.

Senator DODD. Mr. Chairman, could I make just one observation?

I thank you as well for the terrific statement that you have made. And by the way, the little book you sent to our daughter, "Where the Wild Things Are"—and that is not about Congress, I want you to know—is just delightful, and I have already been reading that to Grace.

But just to emphasize something that Senator Kennedy raised and you did as well in your statement, about 75 percent of all children today, particularly poor children, spend some time in a child

care setting. Senator Hatch and I some 16 or 17 years ago wrote the Child Care Development Block Grant, and I am delighted that Secretary Paige is here and that you are going to involve Senator Thompson as well. It is going to be so critical in that child care development issue that we incorporate exactly what you are talking about because so many children are involved in a child care setting. There are about 6 million infants and toddlers in child care every day in this country, and it is going to be so important in that setting that these very principles that you have talked about with parents and teachers be incorporated as well. I know you care about that, but I wanted to just emphasize that.

Mrs. BUSH. That is absolutely critical. When my husband was Governor of Texas and we got an appropriation from the Texas legislature for Head Start for the first time—they appropriated money for a Federal program—part of that appropriation included training teachers not just from Head Start but also from child care centers around the State. We need to also address those private child care centers—and I know that public television has tried to work with this as well—even the mothers in their homes who care for two or three infants and toddlers; we need to try to reach every one of those child care providers.

Senator DODD. Thank you.

Mrs. BUSH. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. As Senator Dodd pointed out, we have the reauthorization of that program and Head Start coming up as well. We want to work very closely with you, Mrs. Bush, and we want to work with the administration. We have made progress in education earlier. This is a matter of enormous importance. No one can listen to you this morning and not be aware of your own leadership in this area. We know that the President is strongly committed to it, and we think we can make a difference to children. So we look forward to working very closely.

We thank you immensely for your presence here and for all that you do for the children of this country, and we appreciate very much your return to this committee. We wish you very well, and our best regards to the President.

Mrs. BUSH. Thank you very, very much.

The CHAIRMAN. Since this is a forum, the forum is in recess.

[Additional statements and material submitted for the record follow:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF BOB McGRATH, A/K/A "BOB" OF SESAME STREET

Chairman Kennedy, Ranking Member Gregg, and members of the committee, I am very pleased to have this opportunity to present this statement for the record. As "Bob," the music teacher on Sesame Street for the past 32 years, I have had the good fortune to be actively involved with children in their early childhood years—preparing their minds and spirits to learn. I have found that my most effective tool in this labor of love is music. My remarks today focus on the vital role that music education can and does play for young children in laying the foundation for academic achievement in school and success in life.

The Research

By now, most of us are aware of the research that documents the association of music making and brain development. The evidence linking a child's capacity to learn with playing music at an early age is quite robust. It suggests that music-making has a positive impact on children's cognitive abilities in language, memory, and spatialtemporal reasoning, as well as social and motor skills that last a lifetime.

Because music enhances the phonemic stage of learning to read, it allows us to hear and differentiate closely-related speech sounds. This is why children with good pitch discrimination are better readers.

Music can touch the innermost creative part of a child and bring out confidence and self-esteem. Since children learn in so many different and individual styles, whether they be visual, auditory, tactile, or through movement, music is the perfect vehicle for discovering a child's individual strengths and stimulating learning.

According to psychologist Frances Rauscher of the University of Wisconsin at Oshkosh, "Children are born with all the nerve cells, or neurons, they will ever have. However, connections between neurons, called synapses, are sparse and unstable. Synaptic connections largely determine adult intelligence. During the first six years of life, the number of synapses increases dramatically, and synapses already in place are stabilized. This process occurs as a result of experience or learning. Those synapses not used are eliminated - a "use it or lose it" situation. Music training appears to develop the synaptic connections that are relevant to abstract thought." It appears, then, that experiences in music during the early childhood period are vital to maximizing the number of synaptic connections and the potential for learning. We must abandon the idea that music education for early childhood is merely a time for kids to sing a few songs, or that it is simply a change of pace from other subjects. Music education is worthy in its own right. It is an essential educational component of early childhood development.

The Sesame Street Experience

At Sesame Street, music has always been an integral part of our productions. Through animation, film, musical guests from Paul Simon to Placido Domingo, and yes, muppets, we have used music to educate, inspire, and engage children in new ideas and connect them with cultures around the world. The early childhood years are our specialty, and we have found considerable success, as measured by the overwhelmingly positive responses of parents, children, and teachers over the last 32 years.

There has never been a more exciting time to be involved in bringing music to children and turning them on to the magic of music-making. Indeed, for the first time, national partnerships are now helping to bring music to young people throughout the country. One project with which I have been personally involved over the past year is "Sesame Street MUSIC WORKS," a cutting-edge music education curriculum that is now a central part of Sesame Street's programming. It will reach and benefit millions of children, parents, caregivers, and educators. The multi-media components will be created in both English and Spanish. The focus will be music and art for children aged birth to 5. Due to generous grants from NAMM: The International Music Products Association, MENC: The National Association for Music Education, and the Texaco Foundation, the MUSIC WORKS curriculum will be integrated across Sesame Street's signature programming, including our television program, SesameStreet.com (a first-ever early childhood musiclearning website), and Sesame Street-licensed musical products. A MUSIC WORKS tool kit will be available for free to the general public through the website this fall and will include a 30-minute music education video, with information on ways to include music in children's learning. All Sesame Street-licensed products will include an insert from The American Music Conference that will outline ways for parents to include music as an integral component of early childhood learning. In November, 2001, we will launch an extensive media campaign to promote access to the free tool kit and to raise awareness of the influential role of music in early childhood learning. It is our sincere hope that this program will be expanded internationally in the coming years.

The Challenge

While I am very proud to be a part of all that Sesame Street has undertaken to promote music education for young children, our work is never done. We are always looking for more partners. Our existing partnerships include organizations representing industry, educators, caregivers, school administrators, parents, and charities. I would like to add Congress and the Administration to this illustrious list. Together, we can meet the challenge of—to paraphrase a colleague from the Eastman School of Music—making music as integral and embedded in early childhood education as blocks and the sand box.

To achieve this goal, we must broadly disseminate information on the music/brain research and its implications for early childhood education to parents, school administrators, and state and local education officials so that local education policies are informed by science and solid experience. The U.S. Department of Education, with its far-reaching network and outreach activities, could be of enormous assistance in this regard. Additionally, Head Start and other early childhood programs receiving federal funding should be encouraged to provide equal access and opportunity in music education for all children. Professional development programs to assist edu-

cators in teaching and integrating music into the curriculum merit support at the federal level as well. Congress and the Administration also must continue and expand the use of your respective bully pulpits to spread the message that music should be a priority because of its crucial role in learning. Hearings, White House conferences, town hall meetings, speeches, and media contacts would be powerful tools in support of our effort.

Conclusion

I applaud the Committee's scheduling of this important hearing today. Indeed, there is no more significant and honorable task than the education of our children. The earliest stages of the educational process are so critical to later success. Music must be present from the beginning to ensure optimal learning for young children in child care and early childhood classrooms. I strongly believe that anyone who works with young children must be prepared to help them find a way to make music. Albert Einstein once said, "I often think in music. I see my life in terms of music." With assistance from committed partners in the public and private sectors, our child care settings and schools will be ready if a three-year-old Albert Einstein shows up at the door.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 10:55 a.m., the committee was adjourned.]

