

Executive Summary

In his State of the Union Address delivered January 2002, President Bush outlined the next critical step in education reform – the need to prepare children to read and succeed in school with improved Head Start and early childhood development programs. The President’s call is built upon themes developed at the First Lady’s Summit on Early Childhood Cognitive Development, held in July of 2001.

Early childhood, which is the period in a child’s life from birth through age 5, is a critical time for children to develop the physical, emotional, social, and cognitive skills they will need for the rest of their lives. These young children receive care in a wide variety of settings. While 38 percent receive care solely from their parents, the remaining 62 percent receive care through a variety of arrangements, including care by non-parental relatives, non-relatives, and center-based programs, including Head Start.

Because a significant number of young children receive care outside the home, Federal and State governments provide more than \$18 billion annually to help families – particularly low-income families – to purchase non-parental care. This investment includes more than \$14 billion in Federal support alone. Despite these significant resources, not all children are receiving high-quality care for several reasons:

- 1) Most States have limited alignment between what children are doing before they enter school and what is expected of them once they are in school;
- 2) Early childhood programs are seldom evaluated based on how they prepare children to succeed in school; and
- 3) There is not enough information for early childhood teachers, parents, grandparents, and child care providers on ways to prepare children to be successful in school.

President Bush believes that all children must begin school with an equal chance at achievement so that no child is left behind. The Bush Administration has proposed a new early childhood initiative – *Good Start, Grow Smart* – to help States and local communities strengthen early learning for young children. This will ensure that young children are equipped with the skills they will need to start school ready to learn.

The Bush Administration’s *Good Start, Grow Smart* initiative addresses three major areas:

- **Strengthening Head Start:** Through the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Administration will develop a new accountability system for Head Start to ensure that every Head Start center assesses standards of learning in early literacy, language, and numeracy skills. HHS will also implement a national training program with the goal of training the nearly 50,000 Head Start teachers in early literacy teaching techniques.
- **Partnering with States to Improve Early Childhood Education:** The Administration proposes a stronger Federal-State partnership in the delivery of quality early childhood programs. This new approach will ask States to develop quality criteria for early childhood education, including voluntary guidelines on pre-reading and language skills activities that

align with State K-12 standards. To help States meet these criteria, States will have more flexibility with their Federal child care funds.

- **Providing Information to Teachers, Caregivers and Parents:** In order to close the gap between the best research and current practices in early childhood education, the Department of Education will establish a range of partnerships as part of a broad public awareness campaign targeted toward parents, early childhood educators, child care providers, and other interested parties. To assist this effort, the Bush Administration supports an unprecedented \$45 million research collaborative between the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and the Department of Education to identify effective pre-reading and language curricula and teaching strategies.