

# GROW AMERICA STRONGER

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# QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

October 15, 2015

The Honorable Lamar Alexander  
Chairman, Senate Committee on  
Health, Education, Labor and Pensions  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John Kline  
Chairman, House Committee on  
Education and the Workforce  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on  
Health, Education, Labor and Pensions  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Bobby Scott  
Ranking Member, House Committee on  
Education and the Workforce  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Murray, Chairman Kline, and Ranking Member Scott,

On behalf of the Grow America Stronger campaign, we are writing to offer recommendations regarding the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA). The Grow America Stronger campaign is a coalition of early childhood advocates dedicated to making high-quality early childhood education a national priority and advancing greater federal investments.

High-quality home visiting, early intervention services, Early Head Start and Head Start, child care, early learning, public and community-based preschool programs, and elementary school programs—all are essential resources to ensure a continuum of care that improves education, health and economic outcomes for children from birth through grade three. The Grow America Stronger campaign is committed to ensuring that an HEA reauthorization strategy advances the quality of and access to early childhood education by increasing: the quality of early childhood educator preparation programs; postsecondary education and credential attainment of early childhood educators and leaders; and the pipeline of potential educators and leaders across our nation. We are also committed to ensuring that supports making quality early childhood education more accessible and affordable are available to low-income parents pursuing postsecondary education to begin or advance their careers.

The reauthorization of HEA presents a unique opportunity to further strengthen early childhood education systems, and particularly the early childhood education workforce, building from good strides made in current law. To this end, the Grow America Stronger campaign makes the following recommendations for the reauthorization of HEA:

- **Support students enrolled in early childhood education preparation programs**

Specifically, we urge Congress to:

- Maintain loan forgiveness, loan cancellation, and other federal student financial aid benefits for students pursuing early childhood education degrees and credentials at institutions of higher education, and consistently provide the same access to these programs for the full spectrum of early childhood educators as is available to other teachers and leaders.
- Amend relevant definitions throughout Title IV, such as "Early Childhood Educator", and the parameters around teachers eligible for loan forgiveness, to ensure that master and lead teachers, coaches to educators and leaders, and classroom aides in early childhood education programs can also access the full range of Title IV financial aid benefits available to other educators and leaders.
  - Throughout this document, when we refer to early childhood educator, this is meant to be inclusive of classroom aides, master teachers, and coaches to early childhood educators and leaders.
- With regard to eligibility for these federal financial aid benefits, include early childhood educators in all settings listed in the current HEA definition of an Early Childhood Education Program (Sec. 103 (20 U.S.C 1003)).
- Ensure that federal grant and student loan benefits and forgiveness for early childhood educators and other educators are flexible, easy to understand, and robust enough to attract and retain candidates into these important fields.
- Ensure that loan repayment requirements account for the challenges that low-income students and parents face in repayment while working in a low-wage but critical field, such as early childhood education, and raising a family.
- Encourage institutions to support early childhood education activities as part of the campus' Work-Study program where available.
- Restore Year-Round Pell Grants, so that students – including those in early childhood education preparation programs – can pursue credentials at an accelerated pace and re-enter the workforce or pursue higher degrees more quickly if desired.

- **Improve programs that prepare early childhood educators and leaders**

Specifically, we urge Congress to make the following improvements to Title II of the Higher Education Act (Teacher Quality Partnership Grants):

- Maintain Title II Teacher Quality Partnership grants, and include early childhood educators consistently in educator preparation initiatives under Title II, including residency programs, clinical experience and interaction, induction programs, and leadership programs.
  - Congress should include language that ensures that partnership initiatives include early childhood educators in teacher preparation initiatives, and only allows them to opt out of doing so upon providing a specific rationale.
  - Language stating that early childhood educators and early childhood education programs are included in these teacher preparation initiatives "as appropriate" should be removed.
- Maintain investments in early childhood educator compensation – for those who have attained an Associate's or Bachelor's degree - as a provision of Teacher Quality Partnership grants to help ensure a high quality workforce.
- Amend the definition of an "Early Childhood Educator" to an "individual whose primary responsibility is supporting the education of children in an early childhood education program" to ensure that master and lead teachers, coaches, and classroom aides can also benefit and grow in their careers from Title II-funded programs.
- Amend part (C) of the definition of an "Early Childhood Program" to include programs serving children through the age of school entry, rather than through the age of 6 – to better reflect program realities on the ground.
- Amend the definition of a "High-Need Early Childhood Education Program" to better reflect geographic boundaries of early childhood education programs by replacing the requirement that the program be "located within the geographic area served by a high-need local educational agency" with an alternate metric of the high concentration of poverty in the population served by the program (e.g. % of low-income families served by the program).
  - Early childhood education programs serving high concentrations of low-income families do not fit neatly into the geographic areas bounded by local educational agencies, and these boundaries may exclude important programs serving high poverty areas.
- Implement incentives or other policies to ensure that institutions of higher education and their programs – particularly educator and leader preparation programs - are providing the supports needed to ensure both access and completion. We also encourage Congress to support much needed innovations and research in this area.
- We urge Congress to preserve the accreditation of early childhood educator preparation programs, including its unique role as a quality improvement system. Program accreditation, within the broader context of higher education accreditation, creates a shared professional identity and improves professional practice.

- **Provide supports to parents and families pursuing postsecondary education**

Specifically, we urge Congress to:

- Expand the Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) program so more low-income, Pell grant-eligible student parents are able to receive a subsidy for childcare to improve postsecondary access and completion.
- Incentivize institutions to appoint an expectant and parenting student liaison and develop a resources website to help students access affordable childcare, housing, and additional resources particularly needed by student parents.
- Incentivize campus children's centers funded through CCAMPIS to offer counseling for parents, and to provide information on other resources available to student parents.

As you continue your work on the reauthorization of HEA, we urge that you maximize this opportunity to strengthen early childhood education and the early childhood workforce that undergirds a high quality system of early learning options for parents and families. Your leadership on early childhood education issues has helped move our country forward towards a stronger start for all children regardless of background, and we hope that that work and commitment continues through this reauthorization process.

We look forward to working with you as you craft a reauthorization bill, and we stand ready to provide any information you might need.

Sincerely,

American Federation of Teachers (AFT)  
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)  
Child Care Aware® of America  
Common Sense Kids Action  
The Early Care and Education Consortium (ECEC)  
Fair Share  
First Five Years Fund  
First Focus Campaign for Children  
Los Angeles Universal Preschool (LAUP)  
National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC)  
National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)  
National Women's Law Center  
Ounce of Prevention Fund  
Parents as Teachers  
Save the Children Action Network  
ZERO TO THREE