

The Honorable Tom Harkin
The Honorable Lamar Alexander
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

June 27, 2013

Re: Dual Language Learners and Early Learning

Dear Senator Harkin and Senator Alexander:

As organizations that advocate for California's diverse children and families, we stand united behind a federal initiative that would prioritize high-quality preschool and early learning for every child in America, and urge you to craft a robust proposal to put our earliest learners, including Dual Language Learners, first.

We must take a comprehensive approach to laying a strong foundation for children's success in school and life. To ensure children are ready for school, and on a path to success in college and careers, we must begin much earlier and make strategic investments in infants, toddlers and preschoolers.

Because California is home to the largest population of English Learners – serving more than 1.5 million students, or 1 in 4 of the nation's English Learners – we know that any conversations about optimizing and increasing early learning investments must also consider how to best meet the needs of children who come from homes where a language other than English is spoken.

In the state that is home to 1 in 8 children in America, we stand ready to support you as you craft a plan to put our earliest learners first. We commit to working with you and our state leaders to ensure that all of California's students, including our Dual Language Learners, receive the high-quality start to learning they deserve to achieve academic success

In doing so, we believe that we will be better preparing our children – and our nation – to compete in a global, political, social and financial 21st century economy. We look forward to supporting a national effort to ensure all children get the right start for success in college and their careers.

Cc: Senator Patty Murray, Senator Robert P. Casey, Jr., Senator Mazie Hirono, California Congressional Delegation, Leadership of U.S. House Education & Workforce Committee, Leadership of U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee, Leadership of U.S. House Appropriations Committee, Congressional Hispanic Caucus, Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, Secretary Arne Duncan, Steven Hicks, Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, Richard Gonzalez, Cecilia Muñoz, Roberto Rodriguez, Alejandra Ceja.



CHILDREN NOW



Organizations:



Antonia Lopez
Director of Early Childhood Education
National Council of La Raza



Catherine Atkin
President
Early Edge California



Alfredo Villaseñor
Executive Director
4C Council of Santa Clara County, Inc.



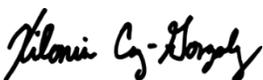
Kim Pattillo Brownson
Director of Educational Equity
Advancement Project



Angelica Solis
Executive Director
Alliance for a Better Community



Diane Ujiiye
Executive Director
APIsCAN



Xilonin Cruz-Gonzalez
President
California Latino School Boards Association



Shelly Spiegel-Coleman
Executive Director
Californians Together



Rachelle Pastor Arizmendi
Member
Campaign for Quality Early Education
(CQEE) Coalition



Raymond Uzeta
President & CEO
Chicano Federation of San Diego County



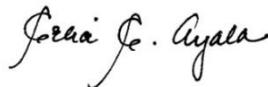
Ted Lempert
President
Children Now



Jose R. Rodriguez
President and CEO
El Concilio, Council for the Spanish
Speaking



Oscar Cruz
President & CEO
Families In Schools



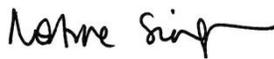
Celia C. Ayala
CEO
Los Angeles Universal Preschool



Arnulfo Manriquez
President & CEO
MAAC



Martin Castro
President & CEO
Mexican American Opportunity Foundation
(MAOF)



Martine Singer
President & Chief Executive Officer
Para Los Niños



Chris Iglesias
Chief Executive Office
The Unity Council



Tahra M. Goraya
Director
Zero to Three, Western Office

Researchers and Early Learning Leaders:



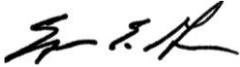
Dina C. Castro, Ph.D.
Senior Scientist
Frank Porter Graham Child Development
Institute
University of North Carolina at Chapel
Hill



Linda M. Espinosa, Ph.D.
Professor Emeritus
University of Missouri-Columbia



Patricia Gándara
Commissioner, White House Commission
on Educational Excellence for Hispanics
Research Professor and Co-Director
Civil Rights Project/
Proyecto Derechos Civiles
University of California, Los Angeles



Eugene E. García
Professor Emeritus of Education
Arizona State University;
University of California, Berkeley



Whitcomb Hayslip
Early Childhood Education (ECE)
Consultant;
Assistant Superintendent, ECE
Los Angeles Unified School District
(Retired)



Carola Matera
Assistant Professor,
Early Childhood Studies
California State University,
Channel Islands



Janet S. Oh, Ph.D.
Associate Professor,
Department of Psychology
California State University, Northridge



Marlene Zepeda
Professor Emeritus
Dept. of Child and Family Studies
California State University,
Los Angeles

To: Senator Tom Harkin and Senator Lamar Alexander
Cc: Senator Patty Murray, Senator Robert P. Casey, Jr., Senator Mazie Hirono, California Congressional Delegation, Leadership of U.S. House Education & Workforce Committee, Leadership of U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee, Leadership of U.S. House Appropriations Committee, Congressional Hispanic Caucus, Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, Secretary Arne Duncan, Steven Hicks, Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, Richard Gonzalez, Cecilia Muñoz, Roberto Rodriguez, Alejandra Ceja.
From: California Advocates for Early Learning
Date: June 27, 2013
Re: Dual Language Learners and Federal Early Learning Initiative

As California organizations advocating on behalf of our state’s children and families, we are pleased to see early learning emerge as a national priority. We stand ready to support any new federal early learning initiatives in the coming months.

Across the nation, more than a quarter of all young children under age 6 have a parent who speaks a language other than English.ⁱ Dual Language Learners (DLLs), often referred to as English Language Learners, have been the fastest growing child population for more than two decades, and that growth is expected to continue.ⁱⁱ Children who are learning two or more languages enter our education system with an enormous intellectual, social, and personal asset that can improve our national economy and security: their home language. States in every region of the country are making efforts to better serve DLLs. California, home to the largest population of English Language Learners – serving more than 1 in 4 of the nation’s ELLs – is proud of its work that is leading the way in helping to improve outcomes for young DLLs.ⁱⁱⁱ

California was the first state in the nation to include English Language Development (ELD) within its Preschool Learning Foundations, which describe what all young children are expected to learn with appropriate support; the accompanying curriculum frameworks also address the ELD needs of young DLLs. The California Department of Education’s Child Development Division has also published “Preschool English Learners: Principles and Practices to Promote Language, Literacy and Learning,” which provides teachers with knowledge and tools to educate preschool English learners most effectively. Currently, our state is updating our California Preschool Program Guidelines, which comprehensively addresses best program practices for preschool DLLs and highlight the advantages of bilingualism.^{iv}

Federal Leadership on Early Learning Provides Opportunities to Better Serve Young DLLs

We believe conversations at the federal level about optimizing and increasing early learning investments provide an important opportunity for states from across the country to find common ground on how to best meet the needs of DLLs and best prepare and support qualified teachers who serve them.

We respectfully request that any legislation incorporate principles for serving DLLs ages birth to 8 as part of its definition of high-quality programs.

We recommend including these principles:

- Effective programs for children who speak languages other than English require continued development of the first language while the acquisition of English is promoted.^v
- Culturally relevant and linguistically appropriate programming and practices are incorporated in all systems and services and are beneficial to all adults and children.^{vi}
- DLLs need specialized pedagogical approaches beyond what is deemed high quality in early childhood education.

We believe these principles should be embodied in standards and curriculum including requirements that:

- Programs' approach must support children in the essential domains of school readiness^{vii} by providing an environment of acceptance that supports and respects language, culture, ethnicity, gender and family composition.^{viii}
- Teachers and providers must demonstrate an understanding of the child's family culture and, whenever possible, speak the child's language.^{ix}
- Programs must integrate meaningful parent engagement practices that help families foster home language and literacy development. Interactions with families must be respectful of each family's diversity and cultural and ethnic background, and goals for their children.
- As with screening and assessment of all young children, a comprehensive assessment system^x for young English language learners should be guided by specific, beneficial purposes, with appropriate adaptations to meet the needs of children whose home language is not English.^{xi}

The Research Base on Improving Achievement by Supporting Home Language

These recommendations are grounded in research; in the past two decades, studies have provided dramatic new insights into how young children acquire language, and how this affects their brain development. Researchers have found that babies have an innate capacity to learn two languages from birth, and that this early exposure to both languages does not cause confusion, or delay development in either one.^{xii}

In fact, neuroscientists who studied images of the human brain have found that learning a second language actually increases brain density.^{xiii} Studies show that children and adults who speak a second language also have an advantage in their ability to think flexibly.^{xiv} This means that they possess the kinds of skills that are increasingly critical to 21st century college and career success

– focusing attention when there is conflicting information, selecting relevant over irrelevant information, and switching strategies if a solution is not forthcoming.^{xv}

Findings from a multi-state study show that Spanish-speaking preschoolers’ reading and math scores were higher when they received more instruction in Spanish, especially when they attended high-quality programs.^{xvi} In the long term, programs that teach students in two languages have fewer high school dropouts, and those students outperform other English learners who are taught in English only.^{xvii}

We hope that you will call on us as a resource as you incorporate the needs, strengths and issues related to ensuring high-quality early childhood education for Dual Language Learners. In doing so, we believe that we will be better preparing our children – and our nation – to compete in a global, political, social and financial 21st century society.

We look forward to supporting early learning legislation. Please contact Deborah Kong at Early Edge California at (510) 271-0075 x314 or dkong@earlyedgecalifornia.org with any further questions.

Endnotes

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- ⁱ Espinosa, L. & García, E. (2012). Developmental assessment of young dual language learners with a focus on Kindergarten entry assessments: Implications for state policies. Working paper #1. Center for Early Care and Education Research-Dual Language Learners (CECER-DLL). Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute.
- ⁱⁱ Definition of DLLs from Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2013). Report to Congress on Dual Language Learners in Head Start and Early Head Start. http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/report_to_congress.pdf and Fry, R. (2008). The Role of Schools in the English Language Learner Achievement Gap. Pew Hispanic Center. <http://www.pewhispanic.org/files/reports/89.pdf>.
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- ^{iv} California Department of Education. (2008). California Preschool Learning Foundations. <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/documents/preschool/f.pdf#search=english%20language%20development%20preschool%20foundations&view=FitH&pagemode=none> and California Department of Education (2009). Preschool English Learners: Principles and Practices to Promote Language, Literacy & Learning. <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/documents/psenglearnersed2.pdf>.
- ^v Based on Department of Health and Human Services (2008). Revisiting and Updating the Multicultural Principles for Head Start Programs Serving Children Ages Birth to Five. http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/hs/resources/ECLKC_Bookstore/PDFs/Revisiting%20Multicultural%20Principles%20for%20Head%20Start_English.pdf.
- ^{vi} Ibid.
- ^{vii} Essential domains of school readiness are the domains of language and literacy development, cognition and general knowledge (including early mathematics and early scientific development), approaches toward learning, physical well-being and motor development, and social and emotional development. Definition from U.S. Department of Education. (2011). Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge. <http://www.ed.gov/early-learning/elc-draft-summary/definitions>.
- ^{viii} Based on Head Start Program Performance Standards and Other Regulations, Section 1304.21-22. <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/standards/Head%20Start%20Requirements>
- ^{ix} Ibid.
- ^x Definition of Comprehensive Assessment System, U.S. Department of Education. (2011) Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge. <http://www.ed.gov/early-learning/elc-draft-summary/definitions>.
- ^{xi} National Association for the Education of Young Children. (2009). Where we stand: on assessing young English language learners. <http://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/positions/WWSEnglishLanguageLearnersWeb.pdf>.
- ^{xii} Petitto, L. (2009). New Discoveries From the Bilingual Brain and Mind Across the Life Span: Implications for Education. *Mind, Brain and Education*, 3.4. <http://lecourrierdesetatsunis.files.wordpress.com/2010/09/pettito.pdf> and Kuhl, P. (2004). Early Language Acquisition: Cracking the Speech Code. *Neuroscience*, Vol. 5. http://fonsg3.hum.uva.nl/paola/Kuhl_2004_.pdf.
- ^{xiii} Mechelli, A., Crinion, J.T., Noppeney, U., O'Doherty, J., Ashburner, J., Fackowiak, R.S.& Price, C.J. (2004). *Nature*, Vol. 431. http://faculty.washington.edu/losterho/mechelli_l2_vmb.pdf.
- ^{xiv} Kuhl, P. (2011). Early Language Learning and Literacy: Neuroscience Implications for Education. *Mind, Brain and Education*, 5-3. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21892359>.
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