

NAECTE 2007 Annual Conference Keynote Address
By
Adele Robinson, NAEYC Associate Executive Director, Policy and Public Affairs

Good morning and thank you for inviting me to discuss with you the federal landscape as it pertains to teacher educators.

What I would like to do with this hour is talk about some of the federal legislative trends and some state trends, since they are related, and then talk about the policy process in this area and how we can strengthen the policies together.

Congress has been focused on teacher preparation for many years now, and the concerns it has – on both sides of the aisle – with teacher preparation is only growing. The 1994 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act put a greater emphasis on teachers and on assessing student content knowledge. In the last reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, there was more attention to the preparation of K-12 teachers. Then in 2001, when Congress reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act again – known better as No Child Left Behind – there was tremendous focus on what teachers know and whether they could demonstrate that knowledge. The federal definition of “highly qualified teacher” means not only a degree but a degree in a specific subject matter area for teachers in the higher grades, as well as ensuring that every classroom teacher has been state licensed.

In this reauthorization of No Child Left Behind, the focus on teachers remains. Congress sees the problem of low performing schools primary as a problem of teacher quality being uneven, and in particular, low income school districts having the least highly qualified teachers.

This focus has been a good one in many respects – fewer noncertified teachers in K-12, more attention to subject matter knowledge of teachers in higher grades. However, as the pendulum has swung more toward subject matter knowledge it may have diminished the importance of quality pedagogy skills.

This reauthorization of NCLB Congress is undertaking now has had several debates about ratcheting higher the definition for highly qualified teacher. Some groups have suggested a highly qualified effective teacher with more tests. There is a great debate on pay for performance – paying more to teachers whose students' score higher. There is at least one group asking for NCLB to have a definition of highly qualified prekindergarten teacher. But there really is not the debate one would hope to have on teacher disposition, on getting good practical experiences with good mentors.

You may have seen in the newspapers on Monday that Chairmen Kennedy and Miller have said that the reauthorization of NCLB is on a slower track than they had hoped. Even if we do not send a NCLB final bill to the President by the end of 2008, the bipartisan focus on teachers and what they know and can do will remain in the next attempt.

What does this have to do with teacher educators for individuals who will work with younger children? A lot. **What happens in K-12 reform has come to early childhood – standards, assessments, and accountability.**

In terms of early childhood teachers working with children before kindergarten, there is **an inconsistency in expectations in the federal and state discussions.**

At the state level, when it comes to child care – subsidized child care – states have sometimes no requirements for any preparation before working in a child care center. Ongoing professional development may be minimal, in part because requirements are low and in part because it is beyond the expense ability of both the program and the individual. Moreover, to keep the cost of child care down, states and work with the stagnant federal child care funding levels, states have been hesitant to raise standards for child care teachers.

Not so with state-funded prekindergarten. There, half of the states demand a Bachelor's degree, the other half at least an Associate's degree. There is much more discussion in states on how to improve early childhood teacher preparation for preschool teachers as a result.

And because of the federal requirement that states develop a professional development system as part of their state Child Care Development Fund plan, states are looking at a host of training, preparation, ongoing professional development and compensation issues. The federal level has similar fragmentation in its expectations for teachers in child care compared to Head Start or prek programs. In **Head Start**, a program with federal standards, the federal government takes a hands on approach as compared to child care. In the last reauthorization, Head Start had to meet the goal of 50 percent of teachers nationally have an Associate's degree. It met and exceeded that requirement.

The Head Start bill, which I hope and believe will be signed by the end of this year, took a significant step in teacher requirements. The House bill calls for 50% nationally having a Bachelor's degree six years from now; the Senate 50% in each state. I believe the final bill will follow the House language.

There are 3 federal bills to create a new grant to states to expand state-funded prekindergarten – Senators Casey of Pennsylvania, Clinton of New York and Representative Hirono of Hawaii. All of them require that teachers in those funded programs have a Bachelor's degree – some giving up to 6 years for community-based programs and one bill only two years to meet that goal.

At the federal level, not all the attention on early childhood educators is about degrees. Look at Early Reading First – a federal grant program within No Child Left Behind that gives money to the local level to provide professional development in early literacy to

teachers working with preschoolers. **Early Reading First's national evaluation** this year told us something too – not all professional development is created equal. Although children did well on letter recognition, they didn't do so well on expressive language and vocabulary. Yet on average teachers in ERF got 72 hours of professional development. As a result of the evaluation, NAEYC worked with the International Reading Association and the National Council of La Raza on recommendations for strengthening the professional development focus of Early Reading First and for expanding the number of early childhood educators who could serve as early childhood literacy mentors with programs on their professional development efforts. It's in the House draft; the Senate hasn't published this section of its draft NCLB bill.

As we have explained many times to Congress, setting the degree or other credential standard or requiring states to develop a professional development system is laudable, but it means needing policy and resources for the infrastructure to make the goal real and fair for individuals, programs, and the institutions and organizations that provide the teacher preparation and ongoing professional development.

That is why NAEYC has led the effort in the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act reauthorization to use that legislation as a vehicle for strengthening early childhood teacher preparation, financial access for individuals, and federal resources for states to develop and implement a comprehensive professional development and career system. The first section of NAEYC's Call to Action for the

110th Congress focused on the early childhood workforce, and the higher education act has proven a good vehicle for those recommendations.

Here is a status report on that bill –

Senators Brown and Voinovich, the Democrat and Republican Senators of Ohio, introduced a bill that NAEYC developed that would give grants to states to establish or use an existing state task force of agencies, institutions of higher education, representatives of providers, and others who work on different parts of the early childhood professional development system so that they could develop and help fill in gaps in implementing a comprehensive professional development and career system. The task force recommendations would be the basis of the state early learning council's work on coordinating professional development. (The state early learning councils are part of the Head Start reauthorization to coordinate standards, fill gaps in access and quality, unified data collection, and professional development for all of birth to five in the state.)

Under the Brown/Voinovich bill, state task forces would have to at a minimum address the following: 1) career lattices and core competencies; 2) articulation agreements; 3) quality assurances for training, preparation and ongoing professional development opportunities; 4) compensation; and 5) resources for the infrastructure of the system as well as for individual affordability of more education and help to programs as staff move forward in those efforts.

I am pleased to say that the Senate has passed the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, and this was included. On the House side, Representative Hirono of Hawaii has introduced the companion bill and we hope it too will be included in the larger House version of the Higher Education Act.

I am also delighted to let you know that NAEYC has been given a grant by the Buffett Early Childhood Fund together with Cornerstones for Kids, sponsored by the Annie E. Casey Fund, to do 3 things that dovetail with this legislative effort.

NAEYC will create a clearinghouse of state policies that relate to a comprehensive state professional development and career system; we will create a “blueprint” for states of the policies and financing needed for such systems; and we will begin a plan for technical assistance to states. We will be working with a steering committee of experts and administrators and will be reaching out to other stakeholders such as yourselves as we move forward.

In addition, the Senate version of the Higher Education Act includes language that ensures that grants to states to improve teacher preparation of K-12 teachers is also used to improve the preparation of early childhood educators. Senator Jack Reed of Rhode Island led that effort, and the paragraph we are most happy about is one that says that the grant can be used for compensation initiatives for individuals who earn an Associate degree or higher in early childhood education. We hope that this will also be in the House bill.

We didn't do so well with loan forgiveness but will keep trying. An attempt was made to include early childhood teachers in child care, Head Start and state preK in expanded loan forgiveness for people in the public sector. Unfortunately, the language was too limited in the final version and applies to public school settings or “public child care” – a phrase no one can understand. **We will continue to work on this and other ways to expand financial affordability of education for our field and to link more education to higher compensation at every chance.**

So as we work on policy making together, it's also important to be clear on our message:

- we support standards that will provide more and high quality preparation and ongoing professional development for all early childhood educators in early childhood development and learning;
- we support teachers having more education and training in the state's early learning standards, in classrooms-based assessments, in early literacy and math development;
- we support teachers having degrees in early childhood education, but with that requirement must come resources to expand the opportunities for degree programs, release time and substitutes for programs, financial aid and higher compensation;
- we need to be clear about specialized knowledge for people working with infants and toddlers, special educators, and English language learners both in preparation and ongoing professional development;

- we need to ensure we maintain a diverse workforce;
- we need to ensure that compensation rises significantly in child care and Head Start so that there is equity between public school teachers and early childhood educators in community settings with the same credentials and experience
- we need something akin to induction for new teachers and directors
- we need to ensure that we attend to the infrastructure of training, preparation and ongoing professional development with resources

As the public and policymakers become more aware about the importance of the early years, they will likely also raise expectations. **It has been a challenging time – raising expectations without sufficient resources; a fragmented field with different funding streams carrying different requirements; inadequate compensation. At NAEYC, we are striving to use the available vehicles in Congress and at the state level through our affiliates to ensure that every child has high quality early childhood education by making sure we give the right support to early childhood educators and those who work with them.** So I'd like to open the rest of our time together to dialogue – if you have questions or viewpoints to express.

So I open the floor.