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**Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions  
Hearing on ESEA Reauthorization: Meeting the Needs of the Whole Student  
May 25, 2010**

**Context:** The Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions held a hearing, May 25, on Early Childhood Education as part of a series of sessions on the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

**Testimony Summary:** In opening remarks, Chairman Harkin (D-IA) and Senator Burr (R-NC) agreed that early childhood education is critically important to ensure that all students enter kindergarten ready and continue to experience academic success. Both discussed appropriate legislative mechanisms for reflecting a commitment to early childhood education. Chairman Harkin pondered how best to redesign ESEA to focus on early childhood education, suggesting that the definition of elementary education begin at birth. Senator Burr recommended that Congress should address how other federal programs -- including Head Start and the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) -- could improve early childhood education.

The hearing witnesses were Barry Griswell (Board Member, Former Chairman and Retired Chief Executive Officer of Principal Financial Group; President of the Community Foundation of Greater Des Moines; and Member of the Berry College Board of Trustees; Des Moines, IA); Dr. Larry Schweinhart (President, HighScope Educational Research Foundation; Ypsilanti, MI); Dr. Robert Pianta (Professor of Education, University of Virginia; Charlottesville, VA); and Henrietta Zalkind (Executive Director, Down East Partnership for Children; Rocky Mount, NC).

- Speaking from a business perspective, Mr. Griswell discussed research on early childhood development (including that 85% of the brain's core structure develops by age 3) and advocated for greater investment in early education. He discussed the imperative of maximizing human capital to compete in the global economy and supported collaboration between businesses, state and federal governments, and research institutions.
- Dr. Schweinhart, who directs the HighScope Perry Preschool Study, encouraged the support of two research-validated components for early childhood education programs – (1) interactive child development curriculum that addresses the development of the whole child, and (2) regular assessments of program quality and effects on child development through observations and child assessments.
- Dr. Pianta identified early childhood education as an important leverage point for closing achievement gaps, but warned that program quality -- particularly teacher quality -- is uneven. He recommended a major reform of professional development and preparation programs and higher standards for educators through incentives and rewards.

- Ms. Zalkind discussed her work in two North Carolina counties, working with children from birth to age 8. Working in collaboration with school systems, government agencies, early care providers, and other community organizations, Down East Partnership for Children provides a continuum of services for families.

**Discussion Focus:** Following the witnesses' testimony, members of the Committee participated in a question and answer session.

- Members including Chairman Harkin and Senators Burr and Casey (D-PA), who mentioned his Prepare All Kids Act bill, asked the witnesses how best to address early childhood education in federal legislation. Dr. Pianta recommended focusing ESEA Title I and II dollars intentionally on early education through curriculum articulation and professional development coordination. Dr. Schweinhart suggested building upon existing programs including Head Start and encouraging elementary schools to be part of the early childhood education movement.
- Prompted by questions from Senators Burr, Brown (D-OH), and Bennet (D-CO), witnesses emphasized the importance of coordination among various programs. Dr. Schweinhart encouraged recognition and representation of communities beyond the school. Ms. Zalkind advocated for an alignment of standards and professional development for early childhood education programs. Dr. Pianta recommended that longitudinal data systems be extended to early childhood. And Mr. Griswell observed that federal programs focused on child development also should be better coordinated.
- Several members, including Chairman Harkin and Senator Brown, acknowledged the budget constraints faced by both the federal and state governments. In response, Senator Franken (D-MN) noted the high return on investment for high quality early education.
- Senator Sanders (D-VT) used his time to decry the state of early childhood education in the United States. He concluded that every child should have a right to high-quality early childhood education, a view shared by the witnesses. Similarly, Senator Dodd (D-CT) largely spent his time narrating various legislative developments in early childhood education, including the CCDBG program (which has not been reauthorized since 1996), welfare reform, and the Family Leave Act.
- Senator Franken expressed interest in home visitation, citing one successful program in Minnesota. Ms. Zalkind agreed that home visitation is a good, evidenced-based model. Chairman Harkin noted that the health care reform law included funding for home services programs.
- Senator Murray (D-WA) asked the witnesses how they defined "high-quality." Mr. Griswell listed teaching, facilities, and family engagement. Dr. Schweinhart agreed and added quality controls. Dr. Pianta focused on the interaction between adults and students, noting that such engagement can be assessed, quantified, and standardized.

- Senator Bennet wondered why less than 3% of the children served by ESEA Title I funding were in early childhood education. Ms. Zalkind suggested that ESEA operates from a paradigm of intervention, rather than prevention. Mr. Pianta responded that while the K-12 system organizes and defines itself as a single system, no similar cohesion exists in the early education world.
- Senator Merkley (D-OR) noted the importance of investing in parent education. Ms. Zalkind agreed that the maximum return on investment occurs when schools and families work together, but Dr. Pianta noted that child development, including the inculcation of literacy skills, requires technical knowledge that families may not possess.
- Senator Hagan (D-NC) asked how Congress could encourage other states to adopt rating systems similar to North Carolina's. Witnesses identified the need for funding. Dr. Pianta also warned that assessments systems must focus on the goal of student learning and development.

**Analysis:** While Committee members agreed on the importance of early childhood education, the discussion reflected their uncertainty about the best avenue for addressing and supporting programs. The conversation also frequently returned to the reality of budgetary constraints; for example, Chairman Harkin asked the witnesses how they would divide a dollar between early, elementary, and secondary education. In closing, Chairman Harkin indicated his determination to address early childhood education through ESEA reauthorization.