

SENATE TESTIMONY OF LAWRENCE J. SCHWEINHART
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ON ESEA REAUTHORIZATION: EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION
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I thank Chairman Harkin, Ranking Member Enzi, and the other Members of the Committee for inviting me to speak today in support of early childhood education in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. My name is Larry Schweinhart and I am president of the HighScope Educational Research Foundation. HighScope is celebrating 40 years of research, curriculum development, and dissemination in early childhood education. Our mission is to lift lives through education, a mission that resonates well in the homeroom of this committee.

Let's be clear that early childhood education programs include early elementary programs in schools as well as Head Start, Early Head Start, and child care programs in community agencies. For the past several decades, the HighScope Perry Preschool Study, which I direct, has provided a rationale for strengthening these programs. This and several similar studies have found that high-quality early childhood education programs help children at risk of failure reach higher levels of school and adult job success and commit substantially fewer crimes. The economic returns to taxpayers on this investment are enormous. A simple response to these findings has been to add prekindergarten classes. A more complete response is to recognize in them a rationale for maintaining high quality in all early childhood education programs in schools and community agencies.

A decade ago, this nation made its first national education goal that all children will enter school ready to learn, and this goal is just as important today. The National Education Goals Panel recognized not only that we need children to be ready for school, but also that we need schools that are ready for all children. The Panel established a study group, which included Robert Pianta who is speaking here today, to clarify the definition of ready schools. Subsequently, with funding from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, HighScope developed and validated a ready school assessment tool, based on the study group's definition, to help school stakeholders measure the level of readiness in their school and stimulate discussion about ways to improve their school's readiness over time.

This afternoon I'd like to focus on two research-validated principles of ready schools that the new ESEA can support – interactive child development curriculum and regular educational checkups.

We need to have elementary schools train in and use an interactive child development curriculum. In such a curriculum, children not only follow teacher directions, but also initiate and take responsibility for their own learning activities. The goals of a child

development curriculum extend to cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical development, not just literacy and mathematics as important as they are.

In addition, we need to require and support early childhood education programs to conduct regular checkups on their curriculum quality and its effect on children's developmental progress, not just by tests but also by classroom observations that give teachers the information they need to do their jobs well.

With ESEA reauthorization, we have a rare opportunity to kick off a national ready school movement, not just as the latest educational fad but as well-defined program of educational reform. We have a rare opportunity to better recognize and treat highly effective early childhood programs in schools and community agencies as a genuine investment with enormous returns to taxpayers.

HighScope

HighScope Educational Research Foundation, based in Ypsilanti, Michigan, is one of the world's leading early childhood research, development, training, and publishing organizations. We envision a world in which all educational settings use interactive education to support students' development so everyone has a chance to succeed in life and contribute to society. David Weikart, who died in 2003, established HighScope in 1970 to continue activities he initiated as an administrator in the Ypsilanti Public Schools. The name "HighScope" refers to the organization's high purposes and far-reaching mission.

HighScope is perhaps best known for its research on the lasting effects of early childhood education and its early childhood curriculum. The research has influenced public policy on early childhood education throughout the United States and around the world. The HighScope curriculum is used just as widely in programs throughout North America and in South America, Europe, Asia, and Africa.

HighScope receives funding from local, state, and federal government agencies, foundations, and individuals. From 1971 to 1993, HighScope was a model sponsor in the federally funded National Follow Through project of curriculum reform in cooperation with local schools. HighScope has long been a partner with the federally funded Head Start program, including being home to one of eight Head Start Quality Research Centers from 1995 to 2004.

Early Childhood Education Includes Early Elementary Grades

Early childhood is generally defined as the time of life when children are relatively young, from birth to age 8. It is a time of life, not a particular institution or setting. In the U.S., almost all young children live at home with their families. By age 5, three-fifths of them have also spent time in one or more of a variety of other settings – family, friend, and neighbor care; child care homes and centers; public and private schools; and Head Start programs. From ages 5 to 8, virtually all of them spend time in public and private schools.

Young children experience some kind of early childhood education whether they stay at home all day or experience child care and education in other settings. Some of these settings provide children with early childhood education on purpose. But intentionally or unintentionally, all of them are providing young children with early childhood education because all of them are providing young children with experiences that affect them for the rest of their lives. These settings vary greatly in expectations for young children, parents, and teachers or caregivers; as well as in available resources, rules, governance, and organization. Some receive government funding, and others do not. Some are regulated by the government, and others are not.

When children reach 5 years of age, society's expectations for early childhood education become more uniform. Nearly all states require public schools to provide kindergarten and first through third-grade classes for 5- to 8-year-olds. But the difference in how we treat children before and after their fifth birthday is rooted more in adult expectations and traditions than it is in children's development.

The HighScope Perry Preschool Study reveals the promise of early childhood education. This study, which I direct, randomly assigned young children living in poverty to an early childhood education program or to no program and has followed them to age 40. By comparing the two groups, we have found evidence that the early childhood education program contributed a great deal to children's development. The program group had higher achievement test scores and greater commitment to school. The group had higher high school graduation and adult employment rates and committed only half as many crimes. The return on public investment was enormous, better than the stock market in the good years. But while this program focused on 3- and 4-year-olds, its findings apply generally to the potential of early childhood education for a wider age range of children up to 8 years of age. The Perry study is not only a reason to invest in Head Start and state prekindergarten programs. It is also a reason to engage in early elementary school reform.

Ready Schools

The idea of the ready school probably goes back to the annual task of preparing schools for the start of a new year. The increasingly important concept of the ready school is more recent. It grew out of President George H. W. Bush's 1989 Education Summit in Charlottesville, Virginia, with the National Governors Association. This meeting produced the National Education Goals and the appointment of a National Education Goals Panel consisting of state and federal policymakers.

To the National Education Goals Panel, ensuring that children start school ready to learn was vitally important, but ensuring that schools were ready for children was equally important. We're talking about the opposite, in fact, the complement, of children getting ready for schools. We're talking about schools getting ready for children. For this reason, the Panel established the Ready Schools Resource Group, a group of early childhood education experts and leaders. The Resource Group's 1998 report sought to answer the questions: How can we prepare *schools* to receive our children? How can we make sure that schools are ready for the children and families who are counting on them?

The report identified 10 key features of ready schools, as follows. They:

1. Smooth the transition between home and school.
2. Strive for continuity between early care and education programs and elementary schools.
3. Help children learn and make sense of the complex and exciting world.
4. Are committed to the success of every child.
5. Are committed to the success of every teacher and every adult who interacts with children during the school day.
6. Introduce or expand various approaches that have been shown to raise achievement.
7. Are learning organizations that alter practices and programs if they do not benefit children.
8. Serve children in communities.
9. Take responsibility for results.
10. Have strong leadership.

These key features are further defined in the text of the report and capture well the concept of ready schools. But reports such as this one have a short shelf life. Concerned with this fact, and with funding from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, HighScope developed and validated a Ready School Assessment tool to make the features listed above real for elementary school teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders. We have worked with elementary school staff around the country, especially in North Carolina and Mississippi, to help make their schools more ready for all the children they serve.

Participants must provide documentation to back up what they say about their school. They can't simply check off items from a list. This documentation makes the assessment evidence-based. It is a self-assessment, which is much more effective in motivating action than is having outsiders come in to rate schools. It brings school stakeholders together to build partnerships – such as a school administrator, a kindergarten teacher, a preschool teacher, a parent, and a community representative. In one state, these stakeholders met every quarter, for the first time in most communities. Then researchers work with staff to review results and focus on school districts' strengths and weaknesses in developing an improvement plan to address and correct area of need. The ready school focus fits right into school improvement plans.

I'd like to focus on two aspects of early childhood education – curriculum and assessment – that show up in many of these features of ready schools. Curriculum and assessment are also essential to highly effective early childhood education programs that lead to long-term effects and return on investment.

Interactive Child Development Curriculum

We need to have elementary schools train in and use an interactive child development curriculum. Let's unpack all these ideas. In an interactive curriculum, children not only follow teacher directions, but also initiate and take responsibility for their own learning

activities. In a non-interactive, directive curriculum children learn letters by copying A's, N's and so on using a practice sheet. In an interactive curriculum they learn letters by writing a note to a friend or a story about their dog. Which approach do you think gets children motivated to learn their letters?"

The goals of a child development curriculum extend to cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical development, not just literacy and mathematics as important as they are. The heart of cognitive development is that children learn how to think and solve problems for themselves. The heart of socio-emotional development is that children develop motivation to learn, commitment to school, a strong moral sense, and the ability to get along with other children and adults. The heart of physical development is that children learn how to keep themselves healthy and fit. We have been working with economist James Heckman and his colleagues to analyze just what factors affected by the Perry Preschool Program led to its long-term success. We found that the socio-emotional factors I mentioned above were even more important than cognitive skills.¹ Yet we direct all our attention to children's literacy, mathematics, and other academic skills rather than these socio-emotional factors.

Some of the evidence for using an interactive child development curriculum in early childhood education programs comes from a longitudinal study we conducted called the Preschool Curriculum Comparison Study. This study involved randomly assigning young children to three different curriculum models. In HighScope, young children learned actively in a plan-do-review process and group times. In Nursery School, young children learned primarily through play. In Direct Instruction, teachers followed a script in which children's lines were the right answers to rapid-fire questions. HighScope and Nursery School were interactive child development curricula, while Direct Instruction was not. We found that all three curricula improved children's cognitive ability quite a bit, an average of 27 points. This effect diminished over time, but was still 17 points higher at age 10. But group differences appeared in social development as time went on. In their school years, only 6 percent of the HighScope and Nursery School groups required treatment for emotional disturbance, as compared to 47 percent of the Direct Instruction group. Only 10 percent of the HighScope group and 17 percent of the Nursery School group committed felonies by age 23, as compared to 39 percent of the Direct Instruction group. Only 36 percent of the HighScope group said that people gave them a hard time, while over 60 percent of the other two groups. The interactive child development curricula contributed more to participants' social development than did the Direct Instruction curriculum.

This study illustrates that the long-term effectiveness of the curriculum models used in early childhood education should be validated by longitudinal research. While this is the case for the HighScope curriculum, we have not made the national investment needed to identify other early childhood curriculum models that can achieve similar success. We need a national program of early childhood curriculum development and longitudinal research. This program could serve as the linchpin of our investment in the future of our children.

¹ Heckman, James J., Malofeeva, Lena, Pinto, Rodrigo and Savelyev, Peter A. (2010). "Understanding the Mechanisms Through which an Influential Early Childhood Program Boosted Adult Outcomes." Unpublished manuscript, University of Chicago, Department of Economics.

Adequate inservice training is essential to the adoption of a validated interactive child development curriculum. The U.S. Department of Education recently invested in a program of Preschool Curriculum Evaluation Research, but no curriculum model required more than 6 days of initial training and follow-up coaching, and very few effects were found. HighScope offers and expects teachers to successfully complete 20 days of curriculum training and follow-up coaching. The Department of Education project may have seriously underestimated how much curriculum training is actually needed for it to effectively change teaching practices.

Early Childhood Educational Checkups

We need to require and support early childhood education programs to conduct regular checkups on their curriculum quality and its effect on children's developmental progress. This dual focus on curriculum quality and children's progress is essential to highly effective early childhood education, but Head Start and child care programs emphasize meeting program regulations and program performance standards, while schools emphasize children's performance on tests of their progress. We need both in all early childhood education programs. Schools and Head Start and child care programs should conduct regular checkups on their curriculum quality and children's developmental progress.

To accomplish this dual-focus assessment program, we do not have to give young children more tests. We need to use observational assessment. To assess teaching practices, we should be using validated classroom observation systems, such as HighScope Program Quality Assessment and Pianta's Classroom Assessment Scoring System.

Similarly, to assess children's developmental progress, we should be using observational assessments, not more tests. Traditional testing constrains young children's behavior in ways they are not used to. Further, it requires young children to answer questions that have one right answer, each child alone without assistance. This procedure works for knowledge and some skills in literacy and mathematics. But it excludes much of children's development – social skills in working with others, creativity, collaborative problem-solving, taking initiative and responsibility, and so on. While it may be appropriate to administer tests to samples of children, our primary assessment procedure with young children should be to use validated observational assessments such as HighScope's Child Observation Record and the Work Sampling System developed by Sam Meisels.

With ESEA reauthorization, we have a rare opportunity to kick off a national ready school movement, not just as the latest educational fad but as well-defined program of educational reform. We can call on all elementary school administrators, teachers, parents, and other adult stakeholders to make their schools into ready schools. We can provide them with the materials, training, and coaching to do so. In doing so, we can reap the rewards of children's greater educational success and subsequently greater success and responsibility in their lives. We can make ESEA a national investment in our young people that really pays off for everyone.