



NATIONAL
BLACK CHILD
DEVELOPMENT
INSTITUTE, INC.

NATIONAL BLACK CHILD DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

Public Policy Agenda 2011

INTRODUCTION

For over 40 years, the National Black Child Development Institute (NBCDI) has been steadfast in its mission to improve and advance the quality of life for Black children and their families, through advocacy and education. At both the local and national levels, NBCDI has developed programs and policies that improve outcomes in the areas of early care and education, K-12 education, child welfare, parenting and child health.

Our 2011 national public policy agenda, which encompasses several of these focal areas, is grounded in the overarching goal of ensuring that all children are reading proficiently by the end of 3rd grade. In order to make progress towards this goal, NBCDI has identified the following five priorities:

- 1) **Protect and sustain investments in early childhood education and care**
- 2) **Increase alignment and coordination across early childhood and the early grades**
- 3) **Invest in early childhood workforce quality**
- 4) **Promote meaningful family engagement**
- 5) **Reduce childhood obesity and hunger**

To successfully advocate for these priorities, NBCDI and the BCDI affiliates will be working to build a stronger, more diverse network that helps our elected officials make positive, supportive and equitable funding and policy decisions that affect children birth through age 8, as well as their families and communities. There are many legislative, regulatory and policy opportunities, particularly with the FY11 and FY12 budget challenges at the federal, state and local levels, as well as the potential reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act; the Early Learning Challenge Fund; and the Promise Neighborhoods program.

PRIORITY #1: PROTECT AND SUSTAIN INVESTMENTS

The current priority of our federal, state and local governments is clear: cut spending. In this environment, it is critical for NBCDI to join with national and state partners to advocate for the need to protect, maintain and sustain the investments that allow our parents and caregivers to work and to access high-quality, affordable care and education for their children. Through joint advocacy and communication efforts, we will share stories about what programs such as child care, Head Start, WIC, SNAP, and Medicaid mean to our working parents; use data to explain the harmful effects that cuts in funding will have on the quantity and quality of our country's early education and care system; and encourage public officials to develop a reasonable, balanced deficit-reduction plan for the FY11 and FY12 budgets that does not cause irreparable harm and require undue and unequal sacrifices on the part of children, lower-income families and communities of color.

PRIORITY #2: INCREASE ALIGNMENT AND COORDINATION

While focusing on funding, we must also continue to direct attention towards systemic changes that will improve the quality of our education and care systems. The last decade has seen significant investments in PreK programs, in particular, but research demonstrates that “when policymakers have invested in pre-kindergarten programs without sustaining quality enhancements throughout the elementary grades, benefits to participants have tended to fade by 3rd grade.” All of the years from PreK through 3rd grade are critical to the educational success of students, particularly students of color and those who speak languages other than English. These years provide the foundation for all subsequent learning, and we need to protect our investments both by preparing children to enter PreK and by supporting them throughout the early grades. There are many federal, state and local opportunities to implement policies and funding decisions that support and promote an aligned continuum of learning, and NBCDI will be advocating for Congress and state legislatures to undertake the following actions:

- Encourage districts to embed high-quality PreK-3rd strategies as one of their priorities for turning around low-performing schools;
- Include Early Learning Councils, mandated by the Head Start Reauthorization Act of 2007, in a reauthorized ESEA to provide incentives to states to strategically link their birth to 5 work with elementary education;
- Explicitly include school- and community-based early childhood teachers and administrators in joint professional development opportunities with K-12 teachers and administrators;
- Strengthen professional development for elementary school leaders to assist them in designing and implementing comprehensive, aligned systems that include early childhood programs and extend through third grade;
- Ensure that the collection of longitudinal data in K-12 is more fully integrated with data collection in programs that serve children before kindergarten entry;
- Require districts to report how Title I funds are used for children under age 5;
- Encourage the development of culturally, linguistically and developmentally valid and reliable measurement tools for young children and the classrooms in which they learn.

PRIORITY #3: INVEST IN WORKFORCE QUALITY

One of the challenges we face in providing high quality early childhood programs is that many of our teachers are under-prepared and underpaid and, as a result, are subject to job instability and high turnover. Qualitative and quantitative research has shown that “the professional development of teachers is related to the quality of early childhood programs, and program quality predicts developmental outcomes for children.”¹ Therefore, to improve outcomes for children, and specifically to increase school readiness for our nation’s children, we must invest in our early childhood teachers and their preparation programs, which provide students with a deep understanding of child development and increase their capacity to engage a wide range of children and families in learning experiences in the midst of dynamic, constantly moving classrooms. In addition, we must recommit to ensuring cultural and racial diversity in the workforce, which has decreased from birth through 3rd grade, even while the population of children has grown increasingly more diverse.² Finally, we must acknowledge the realities of a field that, through dismal and unequal compensation packages, has made it difficult for early childhood programs to attract and retain highly qualified teachers. In addition to our

¹ Bowman, Barbara. *Eager to Learn: Educating Our Preschoolers (2000)*, Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education (CBASSE), (page 9). On the web at: http://www.nap.edu/openbook.php?record_id=9745&page=9

² Kagan, S. L., Kauerz, K., & Tarrant, K. (2008). *The early care and education teaching workforce: At the fulcrum*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press. See also Julia Coffman and Melinda Green’s brief *Reaching for Quality: Lessons from New Jersey on Raising Preschool Teacher Qualifications While Maintaining Workforce Diversity*. On the web at: www.buildinitiative.org/files/AbbottDiversityBrief.pdf.

programmatic and local policy work to support the T.E.A.C.H. (Teacher Education and Compensation Helps) program in Washington, DC, NBCDI will also be advocating for federal and state-based decision-makers to undertake the following actions:

- Support the development and revision of QRIS (Quality Rating and Improvement Systems) across states by providing supports, including professional development opportunities and financial incentives, to help ECE programs meet higher standards and offer more stimulating learning environments for young children;³
- Support the development and linkages between professional registries, professional certifications and QRIS to enhance teacher effectiveness;
- Support efforts to evaluate and increase the quantity, quality, affordability and flexibility of professional preparation and higher education programs;
- Support specific efforts to recruit, professionally prepare, and retain a well-qualified and diverse workforce;
- Set standards related to teachers' ability to engage and support families, exhibit cultural competency, observe and assess diverse young children, teach English Language Learners, and work with children with special needs;
- Encourage the creation of articulation agreements between two- and four-year degree granting institutions; develop incentives for teachers to participate in professional development, and develop standards of pay commensurate with experience and educational attainment.

PRIORITY #4: PROMOTE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Consistent with our belief that parents are children's first and most important teachers, NBCDI urges policy and decision-makers to rely on a definition of family engagement that views it as a "systemic and sustained commitment that occurs across time, spans many settings, and requires shared responsibility from all parties."⁴ Family plays an undeniably key role in children's social and academic experiences, particularly in the early years; research has demonstrated that differences in early parenting practices explain approximately one-third of the achievement gap between black and white children in kindergarten, and that parenting remained a strong predictor of outcomes until at least the sixth grade.⁵ Yet current policies do not do enough to support schools and communities or hold them accountable for comprehensively and consistently engaging a diverse range of families.

- Provide additional support and guidance to Parental Information and Resource Centers, and similar parent engagement and training programs;
- Help districts and schools understand how they can better utilize and report on the Title I funding that is dedicated to parent involvement activities, specifically around supporting best that are culturally relevant, age-specific, and reach beyond the traditional means of involvement and communication;
- Fully fund the Promise Neighborhoods program, modeled on the Harlem Children's Zone, which creates multi-faceted webs of community-based programs that would address the comprehensive needs and strengths of children and families.
- Support the implementation of home visiting programs, funded under last year's health reform act, which deliver support services to low-income parents with young children and improve children's outcomes in health, development, and language and literacy skills.

³ Kauerz, Kristie, Ed.D. and Abby Thorman, Ph.D. *QRIS and P-3: Creating Synergy Across Systems to Close Achievement Gaps and Improve Opportunities for Young Children*. The Build Initiative. March 2011.

⁴ Weiss Heather, et al. *The Federal Role in Out of School Learning: After-School, Summer Learning, and Family Involvement as Critical Learning Supports*. Harvard Family Research Project, commissioned by the Center on Education Policy. February 2009.

⁵ Belsky, J. et al. Are there long-term effects of early child care? *Child Development*, 78(2), 681-701. 2007.

PRIORITY #5: REDUCE CHILDHOOD OBESITY AND HUNGER

Surprising as it may be, hunger and obesity can, and often do, exist together in the same child, adult, family or community. Linked by poverty, both problems are plagues on our communities, especially in times of economic challenges. Currently, more than a third (35.7%) of all African-American children live in poverty, and nearly that many live in families that struggle to put food on the table.^{6,7} Perhaps even more astonishing, 90% of African-American children will receive SNAP (food stamp) benefits at some point before they reach age 20, compared to 49% of all U.S. children.⁸ In addition, 22.7% of African-American girls and 17.3% of African-American boys between ages 2-19 are obese.⁹ Research demonstrates the critical consequences of childhood obesity, which has been associated with Type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and poor self esteem.¹⁰ These numbers – our children, living with hunger and obesity in the world’s most prosperous nation – are immoral and unacceptable.

NBCDI applauds the work of First Lady Michelle Obama on her *Let’s Move* initiative, as well as the passage of the Child Nutrition Reauthorization law – *The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act* – which President Obama signed on December 14, 2010. This critical reauthorization, which meets many of the policies NBCDI advocated for in our 2009-2010 statements, “broadens the Afterschool Meal Program to cover all 50 states (currently it covers just 13), supports the expansion of direct certification for school meals, improves area eligibility rules so more family child care homes can use the CACFP program, changes summer food rules to make it easier for nonprofits to operate, makes important reforms in the nutritional quality of food served in schools and child care, and makes “competitive” foods sold or offered in schools more nutritious.”¹¹ There is, however, a significant amount of advocacy and policy work needed to ensure that this act is fully funded, and that the President and Congress follow through on their commitment to fit the SNAP cut that was included in the legislation to pay for some of the child nutrition improvements. With our community’s reliance on SNAP benefits, NBCDI will fight to ensure that the cut is reversed and benefits are maintained at the level needed to ensure our children and families do not go hungry.

In addition, while nutrition assistance programs, such as SNAP and WIC, are critical to reducing food insecurity and lowering rates of obesity, they are not enough. NBCDI will continue to work on the programmatic level to educate and support communities, families, schools and children in making positive nutrition choices, while also advocating for community policy changes that make healthier food more accessible and affordable, and promote safe outdoor and indoor spaces for physical activity. In addition, it is critical for NBCDI to partner with other agencies and organizations to promote a holistic approach to ending child hunger and obesity by tackling persistent poverty through job creation and asset development.

⁶ Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2010. U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau, September 2010. (Table 4 and Table B2). <http://www.census.gov/prod/2010pubs/p60-238.pdf>

⁷ Household Food Security in the United States, 2008. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, November 2009. (Table 2). <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/ERR83/ERR83.pdf>

⁸ Estimating the Risk of Food Stamp Use and Impoverishment During Childhood. Rank & Hirschl. Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine, 2009. 163(11): 994-999. (Table 2).

⁹ NHANES data on the Prevalence of Overweight Among Children and Adolescents: United States, 2003–2006. CDC National Center for Health Statistics, Health E-Stat.

¹⁰ Ogden CL, Carroll MD, Curtin LR, Lamb MM, Flegal KM. Prevalence of high body mass index in US children and adolescents, 2007-2008. JAMA 2010; 303:242-9.

¹¹ <http://frac.org/leg-act-center/cnr-priorities/>