

**Remarks for Institute of Medicine Advisory Committee  
T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® National Center  
February 28, 2014**

Good afternoon, Dr. Allen and Committee Members. I am Sue Russell, Executive Director of the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® National Center. Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into this process. My remarks today will be focused on seamlessly meeting the needs of children who spend most of their waking hours for the first five years of their life in early care and education settings, and be further focused on their teachers.

Teachers of these young children need to be able to:

1. Support healthy social and emotional development so children learn how to work and play well with others,
2. Have sound knowledge of content areas and provide children experiences that ready them for school,
3. Have the needed core knowledge and skills to use effective teaching and assessment strategies,
4. Engage in supportive and stimulating interactions with children to push their thinking and motivation to learn,
5. Partner with all families around their children's development and learning,
6. Embrace the rich diversity of their children, families and communities.
7. Understand and adhere to applicable local, state and federal program standards,
8. Facilitate good transitions for children and families between and within classrooms, programs or schools and in life, and
9. Professionally engage in ongoing education and training to gain new skills and knowledge.

This is a tall order. Teachers must have (1) substantial core knowledge, (2) teaching skills and (3) supportive work environments to be successful. The reality is that many of the teachers of our young children do not have any of these. And many of the teachers of our young children are living at or near poverty, struggling with some of



the very same issues the families of the children in their classrooms face. And their work environments are not adequately resourced to support either young children or their teachers.

Core knowledge begins with a sound basic education and then includes coursework in child development, learning and teaching. Research indicates that children with parents with college degrees have significantly better vocabularies at an early age and better reading skills later on than do peers whose parents have only a high school education. If the education of mothers is so important, then the education of teachers, who act in loco parentis for 10-12 hours a day, and who have the additional challenges of teaching groups of children, is really important...especially in these earliest years. Our baseline standard for all teachers of young children from birth to five should begin with the expectation of a college degree specific to early childhood education including teaching practice.

But the reality is we are far from this standard for every child, in every early childhood setting, whether it be child care, Head Start or Pre-K. To achieve this standard we must marry high expectations for teachers with opportunities and incentives for teachers to meet those standards and adequate funding for programs to support high quality classrooms and teachers.

After 25 years and 120,000 scholars using T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood scholarships, we have learned that investing in the workforce pays off. Using a comprehensive package of scholarship benefits, retention incentives and a personal counselor, teachers do earn degrees in early childhood education. In community colleges they become grounded in early childhood education, but they also improve their reading, communication and math skills and gain confidence and respect as professionals and lifelong learners. Once that degree is earned, many work toward their bachelor's degrees. As they progress, their classroom teaching, economic circumstances and commitment to the field all improve.

The early childhood teaching workforce is made up of women earning very low wages, with limited education and most



often with children of their own. Almost 50% of the women we serve are also women of color, living in the same communities as the children they teach. These women want the opportunity to get a debt-free college education in the field they love. And the vast majority report that this college experience made them more effective teachers.

Investing in this workforce has huge multigenerational returns. When teachers go to college and earn degrees, children in their classrooms experience better learning environments. Their teachers commit to the profession and improve their practice, thus benefiting multiple cohorts of children over time. Their own children and grandchildren have college in their future, because their mother, often the first in her family to go to college, has become a college graduate. And most immediately, as teachers earn degrees their economic future for their own families improves.

With such a high proportion of our young children in out-of-home settings, I encourage you to focus on high educational and professional development standards for their teachers and their programs, and on defining the economic incentives, compensation and resources needed to help them achieve those standards.

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