

Early Education – AACS Position Paper

The formative years, ages 0-5, are foundational to the future success of that child in every area of life. Without question, the best predictor of a child's future success is quality parenting. Early education opportunities that a young child receives beyond the home can serve to enhance a child's experiences, but should never supplant the parents' role in providing the education and direction for these young children.

The American Association of Christian Schools (AACS) has many schools that provide early education opportunities in both urban and rural areas across the country, meeting the needs of primarily low-and middle-income families. These schools provide excellent programs because of their commitment to supporting parents in their God-given roles as the primary caregivers of children, and their commitment to providing quality care and education. Practically, these schools offer small classes, low teacher-student ratio, and a variety of educational opportunities. The AACS offers an accreditation process specifically for pre-K schools that demonstrate excellence in programs, teacher qualifications, curriculum, and facilities.

While the AACS recognizes that benefits can come from pre-K education, we are increasingly concerned with federal involvement in early education for the following reasons:

- 1. Federal involvement undermines the philosophy that parents have the primary responsibility, rights, and privilege of providing the best education for their young children.** Parents have a great responsibility, right, and privilege to provide the education, love, and support that every young child needs. While intentions may be noble, expanded government services almost universally lead to lower levels of individual responsibility and commitment. Increased control by the government on a federal or state level for early education programs leads to a decrease of parental rights and responsibilities.
- 2. Federal involvement in early education will produce adverse effects on the existing private day care and preschool centers.** Federal financial incentives awarded to states to improve their early education programs will cause states to increase their requirements on existing preschool programs. Many states already have regulations which are burdensome for early education centers, including those which do not receive government funds. Federal incentives will have the effect of increasing these requirements and thereby threatening the autonomy, mission, and effectiveness of the privately-run centers, including the faith-based preschools. Furthermore, states which offer a universal pre-K program have seen a dramatic decrease in the enrollment for the private preschool centers. This has resulted in a loss of jobs for teachers, and ultimately a loss of opportunities for parents and children.
- 3. Expanded federal involvement in early education program creates an unnecessary subsidy for middle-to upper-income families.** According to a report by the Heritage Foundation, "more than 80 percent of four-year-old children are already enrolled in some form of preschool program, many of which are served by private providers."¹ For those families who cannot afford preschool, government programs such as Head Start already exist in every state. Rather than expanding the federal role in education by establishing a new federal program for early education, measures should be taken to improve the programs that already exist. Expanding government run preschools amounts to an unneeded subsidy for middle- and high-income families.

Research proving the necessity for early education programs is inconclusive at best. While pursuing means to improve the education of America's children, it is important to recognize that an expanded role of the federal government is not the answer to solving educational problems. Federal involvement in early education will lead to a decrease of parental rights, and will greatly hinder the excellent education that is presently being offered by the thousands of private preschool centers across the country.

¹ Burke, Lindsey. "The Early Learning Challenge Fund: Increased Federal Role in Early Education." *The Heritage Foundation: Leadership for America*. n.d. Web. November, 6, 2009.