

Position Statement on Early Childhood Care and Education

The National Association of School Psychologists recognizes that the futures of children are affected by many factors that occur early in life. One such factor is child care.

Affordable, high quality early childhood care and education represent major needs of today's and tomorrow's children and families. Although the role of parents in children's care and upbringing remains of primary importance, most families need good child care options. The availability of high quality child care can benefit children, families, and society in terms of preparation of children to learn and succeed in school; increased financial self-sufficiency for parents; and reduced societal costs for special education, welfare, and other public assistance.

The need for available, affordable, high quality early childhood care and education is supported by the following findings:

- Most families require child care for their young children. Over two-thirds of families in the United States have both parents, or a single parent, that work outside the home because of economic necessity. It is estimated that 13 million children under age 6--- about 3 out of 5 young children---are cared for during the day by someone other than a parent.
- Many children and families in the United State are poor, even when both parents or a single head of household are employed. Poverty rates remain inexcusably high, especially for children. In 2000, 16.2% of all children, or 1 in 6 children, lived in households below the poverty level. Many children are poor even when parents work, and child poverty has increased in recent years in working families. In 2000, 37% of poor children were in families with at least one full-time worker and 75% of poor children had a family member that worked at least part of the year.
- Governmental funding for child care is inadequate. Many families, particularly low income and single parent families, cannot afford good quality child care. One in four families with young children earns less than \$25,000 annually, yet yearly child care costs range from \$4,000 to \$10,000. Child care costs for infants are often higher than costs for toddlers and preschoolers. The high cost of adequate child care results in a system in which low income families have few child care choices.
- Many children are in poor quality child care and may be vulnerable to psychological and physical risks that affect their development and safety. Many state and local regulations are limited and do not ensure that all child care programs are of good quality. For example, only 10 states meet national recommendations for child-staff ratios in licensing requirements for child care centers, and only 20 states require teachers in child care centers to have training in early child development. As a result, much of the child care in the United States is of poor to mediocre quality, and some child care has been found to be of such poor quality as to potentially jeopardize children's development and safety.
- Teachers are concerned that many children entering kindergarten are not prepared to participate in learning and social activities in the classroom. Low income

children are often at-risk of school failure and are less likely than their peers to enter school with needed prerequisite skills. Research has shown that high quality child care can contribute significantly to children's readiness for school.

- Need for child care is not limited to infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. Almost 7 million school-age children are left home alone after school each week. Surveys report that there are not enough out-of-school programs and that many children are not involved in constructive activities outside of school. Estimates suggest that out-of-school programs may meet as little as 25% of the need in some urban areas. The cost of school-age care is a barrier for many families, because over 80% of after-school programs operate exclusively on fees paid by families.
- Inadequate early child care for young children and limited outside-of-school options for school-age children can have a broad and costly societal impact, especially with parents' employment, by contributing to inability to acquire or maintain employment, prevention of full participation in job assistance programs, and higher absenteeism and lower productivity on the job.

It is recognized that families have a variety of child care needs, ranging from occasional in-home care to part-time or full-time programs in child care centers. The availability of affordable, high quality early childhood care and education can increase options for many families and provide benefits for children, families, and society. Research supports that higher quality child care programs have greater benefits than lower quality programs. Criteria for high quality child care include appropriate group size, adequate adult-child ratios, developmentally-appropriate curriculum, interactions with adults that are caring and stimulating for children, and comprehensive training and education of the staff. Family involvement and other services for families can also be effective components of early child care programs. Positive outcomes of high quality child care and education programs are found for children and families of all income levels and can be pronounced for children and families of lower income levels. Examples of positive outcomes include the following:

Children

- Participation in high quality early childhood programs can result in enhanced social and cognitive behaviors of young children, including increased self-regulation, attention, verbalization, and competence in play and exploration, and can increase children's likelihood of success in school.
- Participation in high quality early childhood programs can have long-term educational benefits for children who are at-risk, including decreased placement in special education, fewer behavior problems, decreased grade retention, and lower drop-out rates.

Families

- Participation in high quality early childhood programs, particularly those that provide family services, can result in factors such as more positive attitudes and

- modeling for parents regarding their children and themselves and better parent-child interactions.
- Availability of affordable child care programs can promote increased family financial self-sufficiency.

Society

- Availability of good early childhood programs can result in reduction to costs to society, such as costs related to special education and public assistance.
- Availability of affordable child care programs can result in increased business productivity related to less turnover and absenteeism and improved job productivity by parents.

The need for early childhood care and education cannot be denied; furthermore, the availability of affordable, high quality child care can promote the success of children and their families. Most families in the United States need better child care programs and more options for the safe care of their children. The National Association of School Psychologists believes that comprehensive standards, high quality services, and adequate funding are needed for child care for children and their families. Therefore, the National Association of School Psychologists will:

1. Support public policies, programs, and funding that provide equal access to and availability of affordable, high quality early child care and outside-of-school programs for all children and their families. Tax rebates and credits are important but are not substitutes for comprehensive government support of accessible, well-designed programs.
2. Support the development, implementation, and ongoing evaluation of stringent standards for quality in child care programs, including:
 - Developmentally appropriate curricula
 - Appropriate group sizes and adult-child ratios
 - Adequate staff selection, education, training, and compensation
 - Appropriate and safe physical facilities
 - Parental involvement in programs, including unrestricted access to facilities by parents
 - Responsiveness and respect for individual differences and cultural and language diversity
 - Availability of special and related educational and health services
 - Practices that ensure equity, access, and nondiscrimination for all children and families.
3. Support and assist with the implementation of alternative forms of child care, including both in-home and out-of-home care, that meet the preferences and needs of families.

4. Support public regulation of all forms of out-of-home child care to insure the quality of programs and safety of children.
5. Support comprehensive programs, beginning at the prenatal period, that integrate many services for parents and families, including health, nutrition, child care, education, and related services.
6. Support the implementation of programs that provide effective services and accommodations for children and families with special needs. Children with, for example, disabilities, developmental delays, chronic health problems, and childhood illnesses - and their families - should have equal access to high quality child care programs.
7. Encourage the establishment of partnerships between communities, schools, and other agencies to provide accessible, comprehensive programs for children. These programs should include subsidized child care services for infants and toddlers, preschool and pre-kindergarten programs in public schools and other settings, and well-supervised before-school and after-school programs.
8. Support and recognize the efforts of employers and businesses that have family-oriented policies and services, such as flex-time and on-site child care, and offer options for parents to balance the needs of their children with responsibilities of their employment. Men and women today are active in their parenting roles, and corporate and government policies that support parenting efforts reduce the needs for many families to rely on outside child care.
9. Encourage the development of programs that help families identify their child care needs and goals and evaluate the quality of child care programs in their communities.
10. Support continued research investigating factors related to child care, including effects of child care and family dynamics on children's development, methods of improving child care, effects alternative forms of child care and family services, long-term benefits of child care for children and families, benefits of outside-of-school programs for school age children, and economic benefits of child care for society.

Notes:

Data and other information in this document were obtained from *The State of America's Children: Yearbook 2000* published by the Children's Defense Fund, Washington, DC; from fact sheets about child care distributed by the Children's Defense Fund (www.childrensdefense.org/head-facts.htm); from position statements on "Developing and Implementing Effective Public Policies to Promote Early Childhood and School-Age Care Program Accreditation" and "Guiding Principles for the Development and Analysis of Early Childhood Public Policy" developed by the National Association of the Education of Young Children (http://www.naeyc.org/resources/position_statements/position_statement2.htm); and from

the "Fact Sheet on School-Age Children's Out-of-School Time" distributed by the National Institute on Out-of-School Time
(www.wellesley.edu/WCW/CRW/SAC/factsht.html)

Parents and professionals who are interested in guidelines for selecting high quality child care programs are encouraged to read "Finding the Best Care for Your Infant and Toddler," Choosing a Good Early Childhood Program: Questions and Answers," and other publications available from the National Association of the Education of Young Children, 1509 16th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036, phone: 800-424-2460
(www.naeyc.org).

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