



# Responding to the Needs of Young Latino Children: State Efforts to Build Comprehensive Early Learning Systems

By Erika Beltran\*

## INTRODUCTION

Recent federal and state policy developments and investments in early care and education (ECE)<sup>†</sup> reflect a renewed commitment to improving the school readiness and, ultimately, the school success of young children. Most importantly, these new proposals present a prime opportunity to incentivize states to design early learning systems that meet the needs of all children. For Latino<sup>‡</sup> and English language learner (ELL)<sup>§</sup> children, this opportunity could not come any sooner.

Latino children now constitute almost one-quarter (24%) of the child population in the United States under the age of five and are the fastest-growing subgroup of children.<sup>1</sup> Despite these demographics, Hispanic children have the least access to formal early care and education programs and low levels of school readiness.<sup>2</sup> Largely due to low levels of parental education and high levels of poverty, Hispanic children are forced to confront many barriers to school success before ever stepping foot in the classroom.

Without access to high-quality early learning programs, it is no surprise that Hispanic students have consistently lower levels of academic achievement than their White peers. For example, in 2007, Hispanics scored an average of 26 points lower in reading and 21 points lower in math than their White peers on the fourth-grade National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).<sup>3</sup> Eighth-grade NAEP results demonstrate similar gaps in reading and math, showing that Latino students are not catching up. In fact, Latinos are dropping out at rates much higher than their non-Latino peers. Only 58% of Hispanic students who entered ninth grade completed twelfth grade and graduated with a traditional high school diploma in 2005.<sup>4</sup>

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† The term "early care and education" in this document refers to all publically funded early learning programs for children ages zero to five, including Head Start, Early Head Start, state-funded preschool, child care, and family child care homes.

‡ The terms "Hispanic" and "Latino" are used interchangeably by the U.S. Census Bureau and throughout this document to refer to persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American, Dominican, Spanish, and other Hispanic descent; they may be of any race.

§ The terms "English language learner" and "limited-English-proficient" are used interchangeably to identify persons whose native language is one other than English and whose difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language may hinder the individual's ability to achieve in classrooms where instruction is given in English.

Both federal and state-level policymakers have recognized the educational crisis faced by the Latino community and the need to invest in birth-to-five early learning programs that have the potential to close the achievement gap. This year marked an unprecedented investment in ECE programs. In early 2009, the federal government invested more than \$4 billion in ECE programs through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) (P.L. 111-5).<sup>\*</sup> Moreover, in June of 2009, Congressman George Miller (D-CA), Chairman of the Education and Labor Committee in the House of Representatives, introduced legislation to develop the Early Learning Challenge Fund (ELCF), an initiative that was part of President Barack Obama's education platform. The ELCF, if enacted, provides \$8 billion over eight years for competitive grants to states to improve the quality of birth-to-five programs.

These recent investments and proposals intend to give states additional resources to fulfill the promises of early learning for more children. Hence, state administrators and policymakers, particularly the State Advisory Councils on Early Education and Care (hereafter "Council"), authorized in the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007 (Head Start Act) (P.L. 110-134), will continue to play a critical role in the implementation of these programs. Most importantly, these initiatives give states an opportunity to reframe the discussion of how ECE quality is defined and to include the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse children, particularly Latino and ELL children.

To provide guidance on how states can build more comprehensive and inclusive early learning systems, NCLR interviewed Council members and leaders in states where there are large concentrations of Latino children.

The purpose of this research was to better understand the measures states are taking

to build comprehensive early learning standards and to address issues of professional development. Specifically, this paper will:

- Provide an overview of current federal ECE policies
- Discuss the importance of meeting the needs of Latino and ELL children and families
- Examine how states are developing comprehensive early learning standards that meet the needs of young Latino children
- Describe common challenges states are facing in developing comprehensive, culturally and linguistically responsive professional development systems for the ECE workforce<sup>†</sup>
- Present federal and state policy recommendations for improving ECE programs for Latino and ELL children and families

## SETTING THE CONTEXT: ECE FEDERAL POLICY LANDSCAPE

Research showing the benefits of high-quality ECE programs for low-income children has shaped recent efforts at the federal level to address the academic achievement gap. In 2007, Congress reauthorized Head Start and made many improvements to the program. More recently, President Obama made ECE part of his education platform and worked with Congress to create the ELCF proposal to incentivize states to improve the quality of programs. Additionally, Congress invested \$4.1 billion in funding in early learning programs through ARRA, providing more resources to states to maintain child care subsidies and expand enrollment in Head Start and Early Head Start. These congressional actions signal a commitment to investing in young children, which has the potential to affect the education of millions of Latino students.

<sup>\*</sup> The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (P.L. 111-5) included \$2.1 billion for the expansion of Head Start and Early Head Start and an additional \$2 billion for the Child Care and Development Block Grant.

<sup>†</sup> The term "ECE workforce" includes all practitioners in the ECE field, including center-based teachers, home-based providers, and program administrators, at all levels of training, education, and experience.

## State Early Childhood Advisory Councils

In 2007, the Head Start Act authorized the creation of the State Advisory Councils on Early Childhood Education and Care. Each state governor is required to designate or appoint a Council that is tasked with coordinating federally and state-funded early care and education programs across systems, including child care, preschool, and Head Start. Most Councils are composed of state-funded child care professionals and health and prekindergarten administrators, in addition to representatives from child care resource and referral agencies and professional development organizations.<sup>5</sup> Councils are charged with addressing the following:

- **Access to ECE by:**
  - Conducting a periodic statewide assessment of the quality and availability of early education and development services for children from birth to school entry
  - Identifying opportunities for collaboration and coordination among entities carrying out federally funded and state-funded child development, child care, and early education programs
  - Developing recommendations for increasing participation of children in existing federal, state, and local early care and education programs
  - Developing recommendations for establishing a unified data collection system for publicly funded programs offering early education
- **Quality of ECE by:**
  - Developing recommendations for a statewide professional development and career plan for early care and education
  - Assessing the capacity and effectiveness of two- and four-year public institutions of higher education for supporting the development of early childhood educators

- Making recommendations for improvements in state early learning standards, as appropriate

Although funding was not available for Councils until recently, states across the country began their work in developing and organizing their Councils soon after the Head Start Act was reauthorized. Now, with funding from the economic recovery package, and the proposed ELCF, Councils are in a stronger position to influence the quality of ECE services. Given the new focus on systems-building and quality improvement, it is important that states take into account how to shape policies that will lead to more culturally and linguistically appropriate practices in ECE programs. Meeting the needs of diverse learners, including ELLs, will help ensure that all children enter school ready to learn and ready to succeed.

## Early Learning Challenge Fund

During his campaign, President Obama promised to increase access to and improve the quality of early care and education programs, including Head Start and Early Head Start, among others. In addition, the president also pledged to develop an Early Learning Challenge Fund to incentivize states to improve their early learning systems from birth to five and included \$300 million to fund this initiative in his administration's first proposed budget.

By outlining his ECE policy and budget proposals, the president set the tone for Congress to begin legislating these issues. In June of 2009, Representative George Miller, Chairman of the Committee on Education and Labor, introduced legislation to develop the ELCF as part of the "Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2009" (H.R. 3221). This bill, which restructures higher education loan programs, would create approximately \$87 billion in taxpayer savings, a portion of which—\$8 billion over eight years—would fund ELCF through two types of competitive grants:

- **Quality Pathways Grants:** These five-year grants would be available to states that have already made significant progress on improving the quality of early learning programs. Grants would be renewed based on a state's progress toward increasing the number of disadvantaged children who participate in high-quality ECE programs. The size of the grants will depend on how many states are approved for Quality Pathways Grants and the number of low-income children under the age of five in each state.
- **Development Grants:** These three-year grants will be awarded to states that have some infrastructure for improving the quality of ECE programs across a state, but have yet to build high-quality ECE systems. The Development Grants are not renewable; however, states that make significant progress can later qualify for Quality Pathways Grants.

In order to receive funding, states must designate a state-level entity to administer the grant and are required to coordinate activities with the Council. In addition, states have to describe their plans to improve the quality of early learning programs, which are closely aligned with the tasks of the Councils. These include descriptions on how the state plans to develop comprehensive early learning standards, a system for rating program quality, program review and monitoring, and a comprehensive plan for supporting the professional development of an effective early learning workforce, among others. Many state and national advocates have stood in support of the program, given its focus on improving the quality of zero-to-five programs.<sup>6</sup> Despite the focus on quality, however, ELCF does little to incentivize states to develop each of these components in the context of a growing, diverse student population.

## MEETING THE NEEDS OF LATINO CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

In addition to being a large and growing share of the population, Latino children face several unique barriers to school success. For instance, Hispanic children are more likely to live in poverty than their White peers.<sup>7</sup> Latino children's parents also have the lowest levels of formal education as compared to the parents of other minority children in the United States, a factor that significantly impacts how well-prepared children are when they enter school.<sup>8</sup> High levels of poverty and low levels of parental education often mean that Latino children have fewer resources at home that could shape their early cognitive development. Researchers have found, for example, that Latino children have fewer books in the home and are read to less frequently than White children in similar households.<sup>9</sup>

Despite many misperceptions, the vast majority (97%) of Latino children ages zero to three are U.S.-born citizens, although many come from immigrant or mixed-status families where at least one parent was born outside of the U.S.<sup>10</sup> While most Latino children are exposed to English as their primary language at home, more than one-third (39%) of Hispanic children enrolled in U.S. schools are English language learners and speak a language other than English at home.<sup>11</sup> A recent Government Accountability Office (GAO) report shows that children with parents of limited English proficiency face unique barriers to accessing early learning programs, including confusion about eligibility requirements and challenges communicating with providers.<sup>12</sup>

It is clear that Latino children share many sociodemographic characteristics that place children at risk of school failure at a very young age and that early intervention is a promising strategy to mitigate negative outcomes. Thus, as policymakers begin to expand early learning programs, it is essential that states are not only incentivized to develop zero-to-five systems, but that they are incentivized to design culturally

and linguistically appropriate systems that are responsive to the needs of Latino and ELL children, particularly as related to the development of early learning standards and the capacity of the ECE workforce.

One of the foundational elements of building a culturally and linguistically responsive early learning system is the development of inclusive early learning standards that provide benchmarks for ELL children. Early learning standards are developed to establish a framework from which providers can assess children's learning, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. These standards build the foundation for a strong start in school for children and are the drivers of quality instruction and professional development systems. Although many states have developed early learning standards, few states have considered how ELLs negotiate learning in each domain and do not provide learning benchmarks for ELLs.

Developing ELL-specific standards is essential to building successful ECE programs, especially since current research documents the importance of valuing the home language for young children in maintaining ties to culture and identity.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, researchers have demonstrated the importance of the first language as a foundation for learning English, emphasizing the importance of maintaining the home language to develop early literacy and numeracy skills.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to developing inclusive early learning standards, states must design comprehensive systems of professional development to ensure that providers have the knowledge and tools to effectively work with ELL children and families. The ECE workforce plays a pivotal role in the social and cognitive development of young children. The ability of the educator to build strong, trusting relationships with children and to create a responsive learning environment in which

children can thrive is one of the most important quality indicators of early learning programs.<sup>15</sup>

Despite the growing diversity among American children, very little attention has been given to the qualifications, skills, and competencies ECE teachers must have in order to work effectively with a diverse group of students, including ELLs. New research from the Erikson Institute found that most colleges and universities that prepare early childhood educators have few requirements related to understanding the needs of children from diverse communities and children with special needs.<sup>16</sup>

States now have an opportunity to address each of these concerns. By carefully examining the needs of ELLs and how ECE educators can address them, states can develop high-quality early learning programs that have the potential to positively affect the school readiness of Latino and ELL children.

## **KEY FINDINGS: STATE PROGRESS TOWARD BUILDING RESPONSIVE EARLY LEARNING SYSTEMS**

As investments in zero-to-five programs increase at both the state and federal level, it is important to consider the progress states have made and the challenges they still face in creating high-quality environments in which all children can thrive. For Latino and ELL children and families, whose academic success depends so heavily upon a program's responsiveness, these are important questions. To that end, NCLR conducted 17 interviews with ECE leaders in eight states\* to gauge their progress toward building a responsive early learning system for Latino and ELL children and families. Interviewees included Council members, researchers, and state agency leaders. The interviews included questions regarding the state's progress toward achieving two goals: 1) designing inclusive early learning standards and 2) developing comprehensive professional development systems.

\* Interviews were conducted with Council members and leaders in the states of Texas, California, New York, Florida, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Washington, and Oklahoma.

Overall, responses show that states vary widely in their approaches to addressing each of these issues and that most states have a strong infrastructure from which to build upon. Despite the progress states have made, however, responses revealed that states also face many challenges in developing more culturally and linguistically appropriate early learning standards and professional development systems. The following are the key findings of states' establishment of inclusive early learning standards and comprehensive systems of professional development.

### ELL Inclusion in State Early Learning Standards

- **Most state early learning standards lack benchmarks for ELLs.** Many of the state leaders we interviewed explained that the needs of ELLs were mentioned in their standards, but that there were no explicit benchmarks for ELLs in each domain. For example, many state early learning standards begin with an acknowledgment of the diversity of students in early learning programs and encourage educators to monitor their growth, but do not provide detailed examples of how ELL children progress differently from monolingual, English-speaking children. As a result, early childhood educators have little guidance to help them understand how ELLs should be progressing in each learning domain.

Of the states we interviewed, California was the only exception. The California Department of Education, urged by ELL advocates, defined the state's Foundations in English-Language Development, which are designed to "assist classroom teachers in their understanding of children's progress toward English-language proficiency."<sup>17</sup> These standards are unique in that they outline the progress of ELLs in acquiring English and provide detailed benchmarks for progress in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Moreover,

the Foundations provide a summary of the research supporting the need to maintain and encourage language development in the home language.

- **Standards were developed with limited Latino stakeholder involvement.** The process of developing early learning standards at the state level often involves input from early learning providers, K–12 educators, and community members. Each is an important stakeholder who contributes to the development of comprehensive standards by providing unique perspective and expertise. Findings from our interviews suggest that each state has approached the development of the standards in a different way and engaged community stakeholders to various degrees.

In general, states have engaged with representatives from institutions of higher education, Head Start, child care, and school district administrators. Clearly, each of these providers has in-depth knowledge and must be involved to ensure collaboration and the alignment of early learning standards. However, it was noted that states frequently developed their early learning standards with either limited or no engagement with experts in English-language acquisition and without input from members of the Latino community, such as parents and advocates.

States that have more recently developed their standards, or that are reviewing their standards, were the most likely to have included Latino community stakeholders or experts on ELLs. For example, Pennsylvania, which is currently reviewing its early learning standards for alignment with kindergarten through third grade, specifically recruited leaders from state agencies with, as an interviewee told us, "expertise in working with children and families who are English language

learners, including internal experts from the Migrant Education Division of the Department of Education.” Additionally, the Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning, which is charged with revising the standards, contracted with an expert in second-language acquisition to review the state’s standards.

Latino community engagement was especially important in California, which has the highest number of English language learners in the country.<sup>18</sup> The California Department of Education contracted with WestEd, a research and development agency, to develop the state’s early learning guidelines. WestEd, in turn, worked with expert researchers to develop drafts of the Foundations. The Foundations were shared with community stakeholders through a series of meetings across the state where community members were able to provide feedback and respond to the proposed standards.

- **States lack the resources to develop more comprehensive early learning standards.** Despite the fact that many states have already established Councils and charged them with reviewing early learning standards, state leaders expressed some reluctance toward revisiting the standards to assess cultural and linguistic appropriateness. Many states felt they did not have the resources and/or expertise needed to provide a comprehensive analysis because the process of developing standards is often long and requires extensive research and time. Moreover, in times of tough budgetary constraints, states are even more stretched for resources and have not prioritized the review of early learning standards for cultural and linguistic competence.

- **English-only states struggle to develop culturally and linguistically appropriate early learning standards that align with K–12 standards.** The alignment of early learning standards with K–12 standards was a key priority of many states. In fact, a recent survey shows that most states have used K–12 standards as a guide for developing early learning standards.<sup>19</sup> Alignment of early learning and K–12 standards helps ensure that students enter kindergarten with the appropriate skills and abilities required to be successful. Such alignment can, however, challenge the development of inclusive early learning standards, particularly in states where English is the official language of the government and using a child’s native language in the classroom may be discouraged.

Research shows that proficiency in the native language serves as a foundation for second-language acquisition. However, because some states have implemented English-only laws and have curbed bilingual education programs, Councils are much more limited in helping ensure the success of ELLs through early learning standards that support the native language while monitoring English-language acquisition.

## Comprehensive Systems of Professional Development

- **Few states are responsive to the needs of ELL children, creating little incentive to build inclusive professional development and training systems.** Although many states have established early learning standards for three- and four-year-olds, very few have learning benchmarks for ELL children and thus lack appropriate measures for developing an inclusive ECE workforce. Early learning standards outline learning benchmarks and progress for young children in a variety of content areas, such as literacy, numeracy, and

healthy socioemotional development. These standards drive teacher training programs, curriculum development, and instructional strategies. One consequence of not outlining specific benchmarks for ELLs is that there is no demand, or requirement, that teachers are trained on effective methods of instructing ELLs. Hence, there is little incentive to train teachers to understand how an ELL child's development in each domain differs from that of monolingual English-speaking children.

- **Core competencies for educators have been inadequately defined.** Much like how early learning standards outline what children should be learning, educator core competencies outline the skills and abilities of the ECE workforce. To date, only 26 states have developed a set of core competencies, which vary widely from state to state.<sup>20</sup> With regard to core competencies related to ELLs, very few states require that an educator understand second-language development. Without clear core competencies that delineate expectations of teachers of young ELLs, states have few incentives to develop coursework and professional development programs that ensure the ECE workforce has the skills and training it needs to effectively work with all children.
- **Few states have the political will to design culturally competent professional development systems.** Although some state policymakers recognize the importance of these issues, institutions charged with developing coursework and training have little direction from state policymakers to make this a

central component of their professional development programs. Moreover, because of this lack of direction, states have built a hodgepodge of professional development services that vary by location, making it difficult for all child care providers and preschool instructors to have the same access to training programs.

- **Lack of state-level resources limits the number of culturally and linguistically competent ECE providers.** Statewide studies have shown that although the majority of lead teachers in the ECE field identify as White, many instructional aides are ethnic minorities who more strongly reflect the student population.<sup>21</sup> In California, for example, Latinas are represented in each of the ECE workforce categories; however, they are the least likely to have obtained higher levels of education. Rates of postsecondary degree attainment are highest for White, non-Hispanic, center-based teachers and lowest for Latina licensed providers and center-based early childhood educators.<sup>22</sup>

One of the biggest barriers preventing Hispanic ECE providers from accessing higher credentials and training is affordability. Many of the states we investigated support tuition assistance and scholarship programs, such as Teacher Education and Compensation Helps (T.E.A.C.H.)<sup>\*</sup> and Child Care WAGE\$<sup>†</sup>, but such programs are limited in size and the demand far exceeds the supply. Moreover, given the financial crisis states are facing, resources for investment in tuition support programs are becoming ever scarcer.

\* T.E.A.C.H. is a state-sponsored program that provides scholarships to child care workers as they complete coursework in early childhood education and work to increase their compensation. T.E.A.C.H. exists in 21 states.

† Child Care WAGE\$ provides education-based salary supplements to low-paid teachers, directors, and child care providers working with children between the ages of zero and five. WAGE\$ programs are available in Kansas, Florida, and North Carolina.



- **States provide only limited ECE training in languages other than English.** In our interviews, the Child Care Resource and Referral Network (CCR&R Networks)\* had the most training opportunities offered in Spanish, but there were very few credentialing programs and little coursework offered in any language other than English. Given the high proportion of linguistically diverse child care providers, it is important that CCR&R Networks continue to provide health and safety training in languages other than English. The challenge remains for community colleges and other institutions of higher education to develop career ladders and training programs to assist ELL early care and education providers in obtaining higher levels of training and certification.
- **Inefficient workforce data collection has blurred the picture of states' ECE training needs.** States have a multitude of different early learning programs, with a variety of different funding sources and data collection requirements. Hence, it was not a surprise that cross-system workforce data collection was a common challenge for many of the states interviewed. Several states have developed registries that track the educational status and needs of the ECE workforce in order to identify how to improve higher education training programs. Unfortunately, the vast majority of states currently have piecemeal data collection systems for the workforce; thus, these states do not have a clear picture of the professional development needs of the ECE workforce, nor do they have disaggregated data to identify disparities in access to training by race/ethnicity.
- **Low wages make the retention of effective ECE providers difficult.** Oftentimes, when ECE providers achieve higher levels of credentialing and training, they have better options for employment and are attracted to positions with higher salaries or hourly rates. For Latina ECE providers, anecdotal evidence suggests this is certainly the case.

ECE systems must be prepared to incentivize the workforce to stay in these settings and must provide salaries that reflect the skill and expertise of the profession, particularly for bilingual educators.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Both federal policymakers and Councils will continue to play a very important role in improving programs for children as new proposals to build comprehensive ECE systems emerge. Federal policymakers will continue to develop the framework that will incentivize states to improve their zero-to-five early learning systems, and Councils will have the opportunity to consider how their current strategies meet the needs of all young children, including Latino and ELL children, and their families. To that end, NCLR has developed the following recommendations:

### Early Learning Challenge Fund: Recommendations for Federal Policymakers

The administration and Congress must set the tone and expectations for states to ensure that ELLs have access to high-quality educational programs. As Congress continues to outline the Early Learning Challenge Fund, it is critical that states are required to address the needs of ELLs in order to be eligible for funding. Congress should:

- **Provide supports to develop better measures to identify ELL children.** To date, most states have not developed adequate measures for identifying young ELL children. Some states and programs use home language surveys to determine the language spoken in the home, however, more work must be done to ensure the integrity and accuracy of these assessments. In order for young ELL children to receive targeted services, states must be better equipped with tools and resources to correctly identify them.

\* CCR&R Networks are local and state entities that help families find child care. CCR&R Networks also provide training and resources for child care providers and information for the community.

- **Require states to develop early learning guidelines that take into account the learning needs of ELL children, specifically benchmarks related to English-language development.** Very few states have early learning standards that take into account the learning needs of ELL children. Legislation should challenge states to develop comprehensive, inclusive early learning standards that will, in turn, create a demand for intentional and effective instructional methods and professional development strategies that help all teachers understand how to monitor progress for young ELLs.

- **Require that states create pathways for culturally and linguistically diverse providers to obtain credentials and certification in early learning as part of their professional development plan.** In many states and communities across the country, the ECE workforce is more diverse than the K–12 workforce. However, this diversity is not reflected at all levels of ECE services. For example, data collected by the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment demonstrated that although Latinas are represented in each of the ECE workforce categories, they are also the least likely to have obtained higher levels of education. Rates of bachelor's degree attainment are highest for White, non-Hispanic, center-based teachers and lowest for Latina licensed providers and center-based ECE educators. The Early Learning Challenge Fund presents a unique opportunity to challenge states to develop career pathways for providers who reflect the diversity in the classroom.

- **Require that the National Commission, established in Section 405 of H.R. 3221, include experts who can provide recommendations to enhance the development of early learning standards for ELLs.** Despite the presence of ELL children across the country, very few state early learning guidelines spell out developmental outcomes specifically for children acquiring

a second language. States have taken a variety of different approaches in addressing the needs of ELLs; however, instructional and developmental considerations for ELL children are frequently ignored and, consequently, ELLs are expected to perform no different than native English speakers. The Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, which is now considering companion legislation to H.R. 3221, should ensure that the National Commission includes experts who can provide recommendations to enhance the development of early learning standards for ELLs.

- **Provide technical assistance to states based on best practices.** The Department of Education and the Department of Health and Human Services will be jointly responsible for administering the Early Learning Challenge Fund. This inter-agency structure allows for both agencies to monitor states' progress toward goals outlined in the legislation. The agencies should provide supports to states in developing effective early learning programs for ELLs.

### Early Learning Standards: Recommendations for State Advisory Councils

Early learning standards serve as the foundation for high-quality instruction and professional development. As states move toward building comprehensive early learning systems, it is critical that early learning standards be developed or reevaluated to ensure that they address the early cognitive and literacy development needs of ELL children. Councils should:

- **Engage ELL experts and the Latino community to improve early learning standards.** States have engaged ELL experts and community stakeholders to varying degrees in developing early learning standards. It is clear from our research that those states that had the most community input had the most comprehensive and

inclusive standards. Although states often face time and resource constraints, it is crucial for states to have experts on hand who understand how ELLs negotiate learning in every domain.

- **Use Council workgroups to examine and make recommendations for standards.** Several Councils already have workgroups or subcommittees whose focus is addressing the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse learners. As such, these same workgroups should be tasked with reviewing state early learning standards and providing recommendations to the Council.

### **Professional Development: Recommendations for State Advisory Councils**

Most states we interviewed have developed a system of professional development for the ECE workforce. However, the challenge remains to ensure that ECE providers and educators are adequately equipped to care for and instruct culturally and linguistically diverse children. Councils should:

- **Establish a strong infrastructure in states for effective ELL instruction.** Councils must ensure that there is a broader infrastructure in place to generate more culturally and linguistically appropriate instruction. In order for ECE programs to meet the needs of ELL children and families, broader systems must be in place, including 1) early learning guidelines that delineate outcomes for ELLs and 2) strong educator core competencies that demonstrate what educators should know about working with ELLs. Both strong early learning foundations and educator core competencies serve as a guide for professional development and drive the creation of coursework, trainings, and instructional strategies.
- **Develop career ladder programs that attract and retain culturally and linguistically diverse educators.** The most promising strategies for recruiting and retaining the ECE workforce include programs that

provide scholarships, tuition assistance, flexible schedules, and increases in compensation. As states reexamine their professional development systems, it is important that these types of programs have sufficient resources to grow and expand, and that they are accessible to ECE educators who speak languages other than English.

- **Partner with institutions of higher education (IHEs) to develop innovative coursework. IHEs play a critical role in the professional development of the ECE workforce.** A recent study conducted by the Erikson Institute shows that only 7% of ECE teacher training programs require students to complete an internship in a multicultural setting. Councils should work with IHEs in their state to 1) develop coursework to help ECE educators better understand how a second language is acquired and how to work with diverse populations of children and 2) offer credit-bearing coursework and training in languages other than English.

### **CONCLUSION**

Unfortunately, the large majority of states have yet to establish early learning systems that address the needs of Latino and ELL children. New federal investments should incentivize states to examine how to provide high-quality services to a culturally and linguistically diverse population. Federal policymakers will play an especially important role in outlining the kind of progress expected in engaging these issues, which makes it critical that initiatives such as the ELCF contain clear provisions for building systems that are responsive to Latino and ELL children. Councils will also be central to establishing early learning systems and will ultimately be responsible for effectively responding to the needs of diverse children. Research shows that the achievement gap can be identified as early as nine months of age;<sup>23</sup> until policymakers and Councils examine of the content of their early learning standards and ensure the competence of ECE workforce development programs, we will be unable to secure the success of Latino children.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Michael Planty et al., *The Condition of Education 2008* (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, "Diplomas Count 2008: School to College: Can State P-16 Councils Ease the Transition?," *Education Week* Vol. 27, Iss. 40 (June 5, 2008): 10–11.

<sup>5</sup> Anna Lovejoy, *Survey on Early Childhood Advisory Councils* (Washington, DC: National Governor's Association, Center for Best Practices, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> Sign-on letter from National Women's Law Center to U.S. House of Representatives, September 14, 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Eugene E. García et al., *Latinos and Early Education: An Account of Diversity and Family Involvement* (Tempe, AZ: National Task Force on Early Childhood Education for Hispanics, 2007), <http://www.ecehispanic.org/work.html> (accessed September 2009).

<sup>8</sup> Donald Hernandez, *Young Hispanic Children in the U.S.: A Demographic Portrait Based on Census 2000*, Report to National Task Force on Early Childhood Education for Hispanics (Tempe, AZ: Arizona State University, 2006), [http://www.ecehispanic.org/work/young\\_hispanic.pdf](http://www.ecehispanic.org/work/young_hispanic.pdf) (accessed September 2009).

<sup>9</sup> Glenn Flores et al., "Does Disadvantage Start at Home? Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health-Related Early Childhood Home Routines and Safety Practices," *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine* Vol. 159, No. 2 (February 2005): 159–165.

<sup>10</sup> Results calculated by Donald J. Hernandez for the National Council of La Raza Latino Birth-to-Three Project, Miriam Calderon, *Buenos Principios: Latinos in the Earliest Years of Life* (Washington, DC: National Council of La Raza, 2007).

<sup>11</sup> NCLR calculation using 2005–2006 data regarding the number of limited-English-proficient students enrolled in PreK–12 schools from the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs; data regarding the percentage of ELL students who speak Spanish are from the U.S. Department of Education, *Biennial Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Title III State Formula Grant Program: School Years 2004–06* (2008); and U.S. Census Bureau, *School Enrollment Social and Economic Characteristics of Students: October 2006, Table 1, Current Population Survey*, Washington, DC, 2006, <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/school/cps2006.html> (accessed September 2009).

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<sup>14</sup> Linda M. Espinosa, "Second language acquisition in early childhood," *Early Childhood Education* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group), <http://www.parentsasteachers.org/atf/cf/{00812ECA-A71B-4C2C-8FF3-8F16A5742EEA}/Young%20English%20Language%20Learners%20in%20the%20U.S.%20article.pdf> (accessed September 2009).

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<sup>17</sup> *California Preschool Learning Foundations: Volume 1*.

<sup>18</sup> National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs, "Frequently Asked Questions," <http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/faqs> (accessed September 2009).

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Tamara Halle et al., *Disparities in Early Learning and Development: Lessons from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study—Birth Cohort (ECLS-B)* (Washington, DC: Child Trends, 2009).