



## **Early childhood education is economic issue**

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WASHINGTON – Viewing early childhood education as an economic issue was the focus of a national conference in Washington as experts gathered to discuss and share ideas about such programs.

Partners in Early Childhood and Economic Development, a program funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, convened the conference last week.

Participants said that to make such education a national priority, proponents should come together more systematically at the federal and state levels to help policy makers understand the economic implications.

Shannon Rudisill, associate director of the Child Care Bureau, which is part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, said they are trying to build a common perception about early child education by bringing a range of ideas together while they are working on the policies. She emphasized that cooperation is vital for quality improvement.

During the “Taking Early Care and Education Policy Forward” panel, participants said they appreciate the Obama administration's concerns about early childhood education across the nation.

The economic recovery bill passed by Congress in February created new early care and education jobs and included more than \$5 billion for early learning programs, including Head Start, Early Head Start, child care, and programs for children with special needs.

Barbara Gault, executive director of the Washington-based Institute for Women's Policy Research, said the role of the state and federal governments should be defined and that there should be public and private funding for early child care.

John Williams, a consultant at Development Communications Associates, emphasized the importance of working at the community level for early child care. Williams expressed the need of working together with school districts. “Early care education support is critical,” he said.

Williams also said the policies should be targeted to be “inclusive” for all children, regardless of the family profile.

Danielle Ewen, of the Center for Law and Social Policy, spoke to the need for change in the financing aspect of the current system. She said there should be an economic model to make

early childhood education a public good. Ewen said a “revenue based investment” should be constructed in the long term.

In the short term, she said public and private partnerships are important and there is a need for better data about outcome, impact and providers in early child care.

“First, we need to understand and translate it into economic terms,” she said, regarding the significance of political pressures for better results on the issue.

She then pointed out that a new tax policy and a revenue based system is crucial to invest in early childhood education.