

MEMORANDUM

DATE: JANUARY 27, 1998
 TO: KAREN TRAMONTANO
 FROM: Gigi Georges
 RE: President's Child Care Initiative

Jan - can we use their whining as a means to buy more +
 Ten/Wickie/Neera

FYI

Attached are the comments we promised on the President's Child Care initiative.
 Thanks for the opportunity to weigh in.

We'll look forward to engaging legislatively and politically once this gets rolling in Congress. Let me know if you think there's anything we can do to be helpful.

Talk to you soon.

*Elena -
 let's talk when you
 have a moment -
 There's a bit of a
 struggle going on
 in labor
 neutrality -
 wage retention
 increases*

*Shawn -
 Kar*

Get them? bloody just a thought new

AFT Comments on the President's Child Care Initiative

The AFT strongly supports the President's focus on child care as a national policy priority. Because child care is necessary for so many working families, the AFT has long advocated for the development of quality, affordable care and the expansion of programs that work. And we view the President's initiative as a major step in the right direction. However, we would like to take this opportunity to touch on four components of the President's initiative that, if strengthened, could make a difference in both securing higher educational quality within child care programs and ensuring that working parents most in need of child care have access to it.

1. Modify the CCDBG expansion so that it earmarks a certain amount of funds for child care centers that provide access to low income families.

Numerous studies have shown the difficulties poor families face in gaining access to quality child care. Indeed, the overwhelming majority rely on friends or relatives to watch over their children -- resulting in the kind of care that does not promote school readiness in children.

In addition, there is a qualitative difference between targeting low income families for assistance in paying for child care (by putting money in their hands in the form of vouchers or certificates) and targeting them for availability of high-quality, center-based programs, which they most need.

Given these realities, we urge that in expanding the CCDBG with \$7.5 billion in new funding over five years, the administration consider earmarking some portion for existing child care centers in low income areas. Note that we are not offering this as an alternative to block granting. Rather, within the block grant, we are suggesting another way in which a percentage of available funds to states can be earmarked -- much as earmarking is already specified for certain purposes in the existing CCDBG.

2. In expanding the 21st Century Learning Centers, maintain schools as the locus of coordinating with non-school organizations.

The AFT is extremely pleased to see the extent of funding proposed in the President's expansion the 21st Century Learning Centers. Providing for more after school care, particularly by funding school-community partnerships that use public schools, makes smart use of existing resources and provides the basis for strongly coordinated extra-curricular programs.

Although the administration's initiative appears to use public schools as the main locus for after school activity, it does provide that to some extent, community based organizations also serve as after school providers. Because there is a wide range in the quality of CBOs, because even those CBOs that maintain quality programs often do not have the scope of facilities that school buildings have to serve large numbers of children, and because safety is a consideration when children must be transported from school to the CBO, we urge that whenever possible, 21st Century Centers be set up at school sites.

AFT Comments...

In this way, school districts, working together with community based youth service providers, can make the most of the resources that are available to them.

3. In proposing an increase in the investment in Head Start and Early Head Start, ensure that attention to quality be a top priority.

Given Head Start's strong record of providing quality comprehensive child development and family support services, the AFT is pleased to see the President's proposal for expansion. We urge that the highest attention to quality continue be extended to those children who are served through expansion. Based on the strong research on early childhood brain development, this is particularly important when it comes to the Early Head Start program. Moreover, we encourage the administration to seek ways to ensure follow through and program coordination as children move from one step to the next -- between Early Head Start, Head Start, and the beginning of their K-12 schooling. Coordination is one way to get the most out of educational programming.

In addition, we'd like to suggest that consideration be given to opening Head Start to non-poverty children on a sliding scale fee basis. We strongly believe that expanding the opportunity for participation to middle class families will not only provide greater overall access to quality pre-school education, but it will help diversify and integrate the existing program. It will also encourage an even broader population to become vested in Head Start, which is one way ensure the continuation of a proven quality federal program.

4. Target the proposed enforcement reach of the State Enforcement of Health and Safety Standards fund, the Child Care Research and Evaluation and Information Services fund, and the Child Care Provider Scholarship fund to centers in low income areas.

The AFT regards the proposed establishment of these three funds as a laudable effort to build in a set of standards and quality control. Because problems of standards and oversight are most acute in high-poverty areas, we urge the administration to target these funds to low income centers. This focus would also go hand in hand with our notion of targeting some block grant money to these centers.

While we believe that everything possible should be done to ensure that programs meet tests of quality, we understand the difficulties that arise in calling for standards from the national level. That is why, within the various frameworks that the administration's proposal lays out to ensure quality and safety, we hope that the strongest efforts possible be made to ensure proper accreditation of day care providers, track and evaluate existing centers, and promote and replicate programs with proven effectiveness. We have a number of specific ideas in this arena, and would welcome the opportunity to discuss them in greater detail at a later date.

We hope that these comments will prove helpful as you enter into discussions of specific child care legislation with Congress. Please let us know if there is any way we can be helpful in ensuring that the expansion of quality, affordable and accessible child care become a reality in the coming months.