

The Foundation for Success: Discussing Early Childhood Education and Care and in America

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Chairman Kline, Ranking Member Miller, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the importance of high-quality early childhood education and the role that federal programs such as the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) play in ensuring working parents have access to a quality educational provider of their choice.

My name is Dr. Elanna Yalow and I am Chief Executive Officer of Knowledge Universe (KU) Early Learning Programs. With a Ph.D. in Educational Psychology and an M.B.A., both from Stanford University, I have over 30 years of experience in the field of education, and nearly 25 years with Knowledge Universe. In my current capacity as CEO of Early Learning Programs, I have direct oversight over development and implementation of our educational curriculum and for quality and accreditation of our programs. I spend over 50 percent of my time in early learning centers and have a deep understanding of the practical realities of translating policy into educational excellence. I also have spent time in early learning centers internationally, most frequently in Singapore and the United Kingdom.

Serving children and families for over 40 years, Knowledge Universe is best known for its KinderCare Learning Centers. In addition to KinderCare, we also provide education and care through Children's Creative Learning Centers (CCLC), our employer-sponsored child development centers, and through Champions, our programs for before, after-school, and summer learning. We offer early childhood education and care through approximately 1,600 community-based centers and employer partnerships, and before- and after-school academic enrichment programs and summer camps through more than 300 sites nationwide.

Knowledge Universe Early Learning Centers By State

State	Total	State	Total
AL	7	MO	28
AK	1	MS	2
AZ	38	NC	27
CA	190	NE	11
CO	45	NH	7
CT	30	NJ	56
DC	4	NM	5
DE	7	NV	9
FL	67	NY	19
GA	33	OH	108
IA	9	OK	18
IL	128	OR	25
IN	36	PA	91
KS	17	RI	2
KY	12	TN	24
LA	7	TX	111
MA	66	UT	8
MD	41	VA	85
MI	34	WA	71
MN	70	WI	48

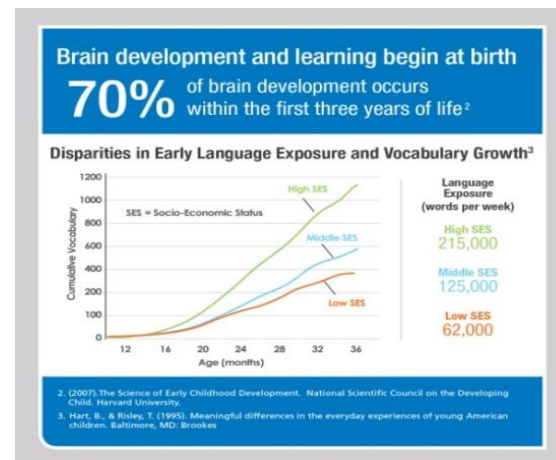
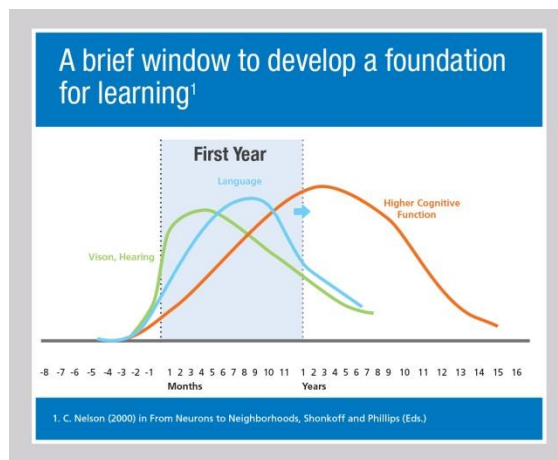
We are honored each day to provide high-quality education and care to over 150,000 children across the United States. Our children range in age from six weeks to 12 years of age. We are committed to serving all children regardless of background and financial circumstance, and we are proud of the diverse group of children we currently serve. Approximately one-third of our children are from low-income working families who receive assistance under the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), and each year we serve approximately 27 million meals through the Child and Adult Care Food Program. In addition, led by our Inclusion Services team, each year we assist more than 2,500 children with special needs. We are also the largest partner

with Child Care Aware and the Department of Defense in providing high-quality community-based childcare for America's military families, serving some 2,700 active duty families.

Children Served In Knowledge Universe Programs by Age

Age Group	% of children served
Infants	10.7
Toddlers	12.7
Twos	13.4
Preschool	25.7
Pre-K	15.3
Kindergarten	3.0
School-age	19.0

The core focus of Knowledge Universe is the quality of each child's educational experience. When parents choose our KinderCare centers, in addition to wanting their child to be safe and well-cared for, they also expect their child to receive the highest-quality educational experience possible. Learning begins well before a child begins preschool. As is well documented by research, 70 percent of brain development occurs during the first three years of life. Thus, providing a quality educational foundation in the early years is critical for future success in school and beyond.



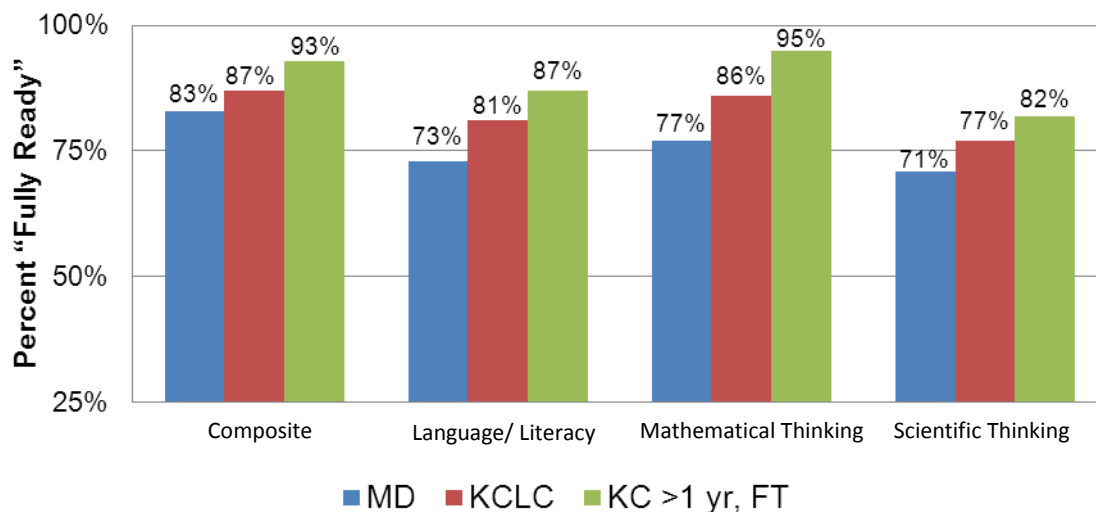
To ensure that our children have this strong foundation, our teachers deliver our proprietary developmental curriculum for children from birth through pre-k that covers the essential domains of child development -- language and literacy development, physical development and wellness, social and emotional development, executive function, cognitive development, and creative expression. Additionally, to ensure a seamless transition from our educational program to a child's elementary school curriculum, we have aligned our curriculum with State Standards in

English Language Arts and Mathematics and with early learning standards in the 39 states in which we operate.

Since it is essential that we continually review our curriculum to ensure that it meets the educational needs of children and that it reflects the latest research in child development, we are very excited about our newly refreshed curriculum that has recently been introduced in our preschool and pre-k classrooms and that will be available in our infant, toddler, and twos programs later this year. We have worked with outside subject matter and developmental experts to ensure that our new curriculum is consistent with the latest research and best practices in early childhood education and that it will meet the diverse needs of the children we serve.

To ensure continued quality and improvement in our educational programming, we embrace the opportunity to subject our centers and our programs to outside review. Our goal is that 100 percent of our eligible centers be nationally accredited, and we have achieved this recognition at 763 of our centers, more than any other provider in the United States. The balance of our centers are already in process or will be initiating accreditation within the next 18 months. We also actively participate in and support state Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS). Our teachers formally assess each of our children three times annually to help us evaluate the impact of our programs, to inform parents about the child's progress, and to support improved classroom practice. To provide even more robust data, we are committed to working with states to follow the performance of our children as they enter kindergarten.

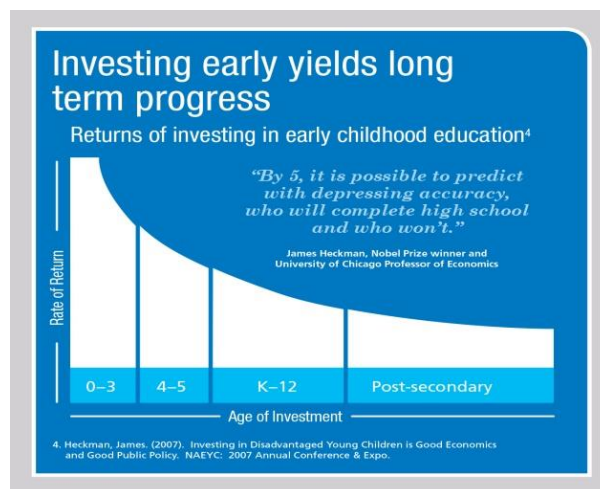
For example, we recently partnered with the state of Maryland to evaluate the school readiness of children who attended our KinderCare centers. Data from the Maryland statewide kindergarten assessment showed that a higher percentage of Maryland children who had attended KinderCare were "fully ready" on key school readiness indicators in language/literacy, mathematical thinking, and scientific thinking than their peers who did not attend KinderCare. Additionally, Maryland children who had participated in KinderCare on a full-time basis for more than one year showed even higher percentages of school readiness, thus indicating positive outcomes with a higher and more concentrated dose of KinderCare.



Without the dedication of our over 24,000 teachers in our classrooms, we would not be able to deliver the high-quality education and care that we do each day. As you well know, however, attracting and retaining qualified individuals in the field of early education and care has historically been difficult. Given the size of our teaching force and our commitment to ensuring the best educational experiences for our children, we are working with scientists at The Gallup Organization to develop a teacher selection tool to screen applicants for teaching and center director positions to ensure high-quality center leadership and teachers in all of our classrooms. We are currently validating this instrument to ensure that it differentiates between our best and a contrast group, and we are studying the correlation between performance on this screen with critical factors such as teacher retention, family retention, child outcomes, and other characteristics such as educational level and demographic profile.

Federal Investment in Early Childhood Education and Care

This is an important and exciting time for early childhood education. Supported by research, there is a growing recognition of both the short and long-term benefits of high-quality early learning experiences on young children, including healthy brain development, school readiness, future success in school, as well as related positive economic and societal benefits.



With so much attention and focus on a child's earliest years, it is critical that we get our policies right. It is important that our investments focus on the children who will benefit most; are fiscally responsible and sustainable; keep an eye towards possible adverse consequences of well-intentioned efforts; promote continuous program improvement and quality; recognize and respect that we cannot afford to displace the many qualified, experienced, and dedicated teachers already serving our youngest citizens; and continue to support and respect parental choice to meet the needs of individual children and families.

I would like to spend a few moments on this last point. When parents make the decision to entrust their children to the care of others, be they six weeks or four years of age, it is critical that parents be fully engaged in the process and feel confident about the options they have and the choices they have made. No two families are the same, and every child and family situation is unique. Our nation's current mixed delivery model of early education and care respects and provides for the individual choices and needs of children and families and offers the best environment for creating strong family-provider partnerships and engagement. It further leverages the need for continuous improvement necessary to remain competitive in the private sector, for the benefit of all children served.

The current CCDBG program serves as an important model for mixed delivery. Though CCDBG has not been reauthorized since 1996, the program continues to provide vital support for America's working families. Eleven million children under age five (54% of young children) have mothers who work, and of those 11 million children 7.3 million have mothers who work full-time. Unlike some programs that target only a certain age of children or that provide only a half-day or school-year program, under CCDBG low-income working families can choose a provider for their children ages birth to age 12 that meets a parents' working schedules be they full-day, half-day, before-school, after-school, year-round, or summer only. For children of low-income working families, the allowance for full-day, year-round education provides for greater consistency and better outcomes. They also have access to the same schools and classrooms that are available to children from more affluent backgrounds, and benefit from a more diverse and balanced learning environment.

I would like to make another important point about the economic value of a mixed delivery model. When children who require financial assistance are served alongside of their more affluent peers, those in financial need benefit directly from the higher tuitions paid by the private pay families. For example, in KinderCare, our average discount rate for subsidized families is 26 percent of the private pay rate, with a differential payment of close to 50 percent in some states (such as CO, WA, and MA). These lower income children benefit from the same quality as their peers, which is only possible because of the incremental fees paid by our private pay families, which therefore serves as an indirect subsidy for quality over and above whatever subsidy is provided by the government.

While the CCDBG program is vital to many of America's working families, I would be remiss if I did not point out a few areas you may wish to consider for improvement. As I mentioned earlier, it has been almost two decades since Congress last authorized CCDBG. In that time, we have learned much more about the importance of quality educational programming, especially for low-income children. But I cannot emphasize enough that it is quality, not custodial care that promotes long-term benefits. Efforts to provide higher reimbursement rates that cover the full cost of quality care should be made to ensure that all children receiving services do so in a safe, secure, and enriched learning environment. We further believe that continuous program improvement can and should be incentivized through state Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) and national accreditation.

I also ask that you consider changes to CCDBG that would allow greater continuity of care for children especially as relates to the determination and redetermination processes. Continuity of care is a critical component of child development. Yet, currently children can lose access to care any time during the year due to an unexpected job loss or change in income. While maintaining program integrity, it is possible to allow for less frequent and disruptive redeterminations and to allow for parents to seek increased wages without the fear of immediate loss of their child care subsidy.

I would like to leave you with one final observation. An additional benefit of our current mixed delivery model for early childhood education and care from a public policy perspective is that this system has excess capacity that easily could be tapped to serve more children without incremental investment in bricks and mortar, and we can also leverage the existing fixed costs in areas such as program management and professional training. Even today a number of states utilize this mixed delivery model to tap into capacity among an array of high-quality providers in implementing their state preschool programs, but this opportunity can and should be expanded. For instance, Knowledge Universe participates in the state voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in Florida and Georgia, among other states. Additionally, we participate in a number of Head Start partnerships in the state of Ohio. All of these varieties of public-private partnerships could be better utilized to provide more children and families access to a high-quality early learning experience that best meets their needs.

As we weigh our country's priorities, one is hard pressed to cite any more important area of opportunity for our economic prosperity, our global competitiveness, and our nation's security. But any and all investments must be carefully considered to optimize the return to our citizens and the impact on our children. And, although we all recognize the importance of a high-quality early education to a child's future success, we continue to struggle from a policy perspective to figure out how to ensure more children have that great start.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak with you this morning. I look forward to your questions and discussion.