

# **Role Of The Federal Government In Public Education: Where Are We Now And The Impact Upon Early Childhood Education**

The United States has changed dramatically since the early debates on public schools. The responsibility for education for the common good shifted from mainly local control to state control. Now, in 2011, attention is coming from the federal government and national organizations to control standards.

Congress is currently in a debate and stalemate over the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965 ESEA, reauthorized as “No Child Left Behind” in 2001). Major issues include the purpose and role of the federal government in public education.

**Pro:** An increased role of the federal government in education ensures equal education opportunities for all children across the country, so that we will be better prepared to compete globally. The federal government has always had a part in distributing funding to state and local school districts for specific needs, so there will be more consistency across the districts and states.

**Con:** Education has traditionally been a local and state issue. An increased role of the federal government will add to the number of unfunded federal mandates (laws passed with no monetary support). Decisions at the local level best serve the needs of students in the local area.

## **Funding for Early Childhood Education**

This Brief covers the reasons for the federal role in public education relating to early childhood, the importance of parent education, and the pros and cons related to federal intervention in early childhood education.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) creates standards and guidance for early childhood providers across the country. Their position statements promote and endorse an integrated, well-financed system of early care and education for the learning and development of all children, including children in poverty.

## **Timeline of Major Federal Programs for Early Childhood up to 2010**

<b>Title</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
Head Start	1965	Funded by U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services to provide children from low-income families free access to early education. It also includes children who are at risk and with disabilities.
Even Start Title I, Part B.	1988	Integrated early childhood education to low-income parents for children birth through age 7, integrating

		adult education and early childhood learning with family literacy programs.
Early Head Start	1995	Funded programs for low-income families supporting 2 generations, usually mothers and infants and toddlers.
Title I of Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)	Many revisions since 1965	Local education agencies apply to state agencies for approval of the program that is subsequently funded by the federal government.
No Child Left Behind (NCLB)	2001	Promotes the use of Title I, Part A, to fund pre-school programs, recognizing the importance of preparing children for entering school with language, cognitive and early reading skills.
Early Reading First	2002	Extends the goals of NCLB under Reading First to preschoolers.
Special Education preschool grants and state grants programs 3-5	2002	Part of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) funding for preschool students ages 3 to 5.
Special Education Grants for Infants and Families	2007	Part C of IDEA (birth to 2 for children with disabilities)
Child Care Development Fund (CCDF)	Many revisions since 1990	The Child Care and Development Fund assists low-income families, families receiving temporary public assistance, and those transitioning from public assistance in obtaining child care so they can work or attend training/education.

**Pros:** From an economic standpoint, achieving equity builds lasting value. Heckman’s (2010) research shows that inequality in the development of human capabilities produces negative social and economic outcomes at every level and can be prevented by the proper investment in people. Early childhood education, particularly for disadvantaged children and their families, levels the playing field to provide equal opportunities for success. Every dollar invested in early childhood education returns ten cents on the dollar annually for the life of a child, a 10 percent per year return on investments. Furthermore, solid economic returns are possible, providing investments come early and are comprehensive, cohesive, and sustained over time, because it shapes the future and builds equity. Heckman warns that investing later chains us to fixing the missed opportunities of the past that are very costly. Heckman’s research clearly documents the impact of quality early childhood education upon later success in school, and beyond, in health and in economic advantages for society in general.

**Cons:** Reasons against the federal involvement in early childhood basically come from providers of childcare centers as well as legislators. Some argue that universal preschool will be too expensive to support and that it will take away funding for K-12 grades. Educators who own and manage private preschools raise concerns that parents will choose “free” preschools instead of private ones.

## References

Heckman, J.J. (2010, December). Invest in early childhood development: Reduce deficits, strengthen the economy. Retrieved from <http://www.heckmanequation.org>

Education Liberty Watch (March 20, 2011). Retrieved from <http://edlibertywatch.org/2011/03/studies-on-effectiveness-of-early-childhood-programs/>

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