

The Old Dominion Association of Church Schools shares the federal government's concern that our small children get an excellent start in life, placing them on the road to a happy, successful, and fulfilling life. With that concern in mind, ODACS requests that the federal Department of Education reconsider its newest round of competitive grants, the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge. We believe that such a use of tax-payer dollars is unwise public policy, and not in the best interest of our children, for the following reasons.

**1. An expanding role of the federal government in America's early learning system would prove to be a disincentive to good parenting.** A common current drumbeat among public educators and education policy makers is that public schools could do a better job if only parents did their job well. The bemoaning of a lack of parental engagement in the education process becomes a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy when the federal government seeks an-ever increasing role for itself in child rearing, thus conditioning parents to view their own role in child rearing as legitimately smaller than the government's.

**2. Experience demonstrates that preschool attendance has limited positive impact on academic success, if any.** A study has found that by the end of first grade, students who had participated in the Georgia Pre-K program had skills similar to students who had not attended preschool. Similar results were recently reported in Oklahoma. [1]

**3. Claims from research of economic and academic benefits from preschool programs are inconclusive at best.** Perhaps the most famous study that claims a \$7 return on every \$1 invested in pre-K is the High/Scope Perry program in Ypsilanti, Michigan, that began in the 1960's. This is in part because of the unique structure of the Perry program. For example, the number of students diagnosed as "mentally impaired" in the study's non-program group was twice as many as in the program group. Additionally, "[p]rograms inspired by the High/Scope Perry Preschool program have seldom if ever replicated it." [2]

**4. Previous federal efforts to improve outcomes by means of preschool investment have failed.** The government's own research has proven "that, by the end of the first grade, children who attended Head Start are essentially indistinguishable from a control group of students who didn't." [3]

**5. The President's preschool initiative, *Plan for Early Education for All Americans* [4], raises in our minds the following questions which warrant serious discussion.**

- Were we not told years ago that expansion of kindergarten would "close America's school readiness gap"? Has kindergarten fulfilled this promise?
- Can we correctly infer from the phrase "for All Americans" that the final objective of this effort is compulsory preschool? Is the targeting of "High

Needs Children” really a foot-in-the-door approach to get to the real goal of compulsory preschool for all children?

- Does the inclusion of federally funded home visits not betray a basic mistrust of parents on the part of the federal government? Is the government capable of doing a better job of child rearing than parents are? Does the government’s interest in and care for a child’s well-being exceed the parent’ interest and care? Will “voluntary home visits” always remain voluntary if this initiative is implemented?

We appreciate the department’s careful consideration of our opinions on this important issue.

Dan Zacharias  
Executive Director  
Old Dominion Association of Church Schools

[1] Lindsey Burke, *Does Universal Preschool Improve Learning? Lessons from Georgia and Oklahoma*, at [http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2009/05/does-universal-preschool-improve-learning-lessons-from-georgia-and-oklahoma#\\_ftn54](http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2009/05/does-universal-preschool-improve-learning-lessons-from-georgia-and-oklahoma#_ftn54), May 14, 2009

[2] J. Schweinhart, *How to Take the High/Scope Perry Preschool Study to Scale*, at <http://www.earlychildhoodrc.org/events/presentations/schweinhart.pdf>

[3] Andrew J. Coulson, *Head Start: A Tragic Waste of Money*, at <http://www.cato.org/publications/commentary/head-start-tragic-waste-money>

[4] The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, *Fact Sheet President Obama’s Plan for Early Education for all Americans*, at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/02/13/fact-sheet-president-obama-s-plan-early-education-all-americans>