

Date: March 22, 2012

To: Reyna Hernandez and Linda Tomlinson, Illinois State Board of Education

From: Jeanna Capito, Positive Parenting DuPage and Karen Yarbrough, Ounce of Prevention Fund on behalf of the Infant Toddler Committee of the Illinois Early Learning Council

Re: Restructured Teacher Certification

As the Illinois State Board of Education undertakes restructuring of the teacher licensure system in Illinois, the Infant Toddler Committee of the Early Learning Council (ELC) makes the following recommendations:

- **The early learning endorsement should continue to cover the birth through 3rd grade span** as has been the case with the Type 04 certification. A longstanding and growing body of research documents that this period constitutes a specific learning continuum during which children develop foundational skills in cognitive, emotional, physical, language and social domains of growth.
- **The grade overlap between endorsements covering K-3rd grades should be eliminated or minimized** to ensure that early elementary students are taught by professionals with the knowledge and skills to build on previous experiences and successfully transition children into the intermediate grades.

Illinois is a recognized leader in the nation as a result of its longstanding commitment to funding programs for infants and toddlers through an education funding stream. Since 1989, Prevention Initiative programs have provided high-quality research-based services to pregnant women, infants, toddlers and their families. We must reinforce this commitment, overtly acknowledging the first three years of life as part of the formal educational continuum, by continuing to include infants and toddlers in the revised early childhood endorsement. Disenfranchising infant toddler professionals from this endorsement would be a major step backward for our state.

In addition to reinforcing our states' commitment to its youngest learners through the Illinois State Board of Education, the inclusion of the birth to age three range in this endorsement has substantial implications for other infant toddler serving systems in the state. The Illinois Infant Toddler Credential, a recognition of specialized and advanced training and experience of professionals in the field, is built upon a larger early childhood education credential that is aligned with the current Type 04 certification. Excluding infants and toddlers from the new endorsement would result, as we have seen in other states (PA for example), in a decrease in the availability of infant toddler focused coursework. The lack of specific infant toddler focused

coursework throughout the higher education system would in turn jeopardize individuals' ability to attain the IT Credential.

We know that children are successful learners when there is a comprehensive, coordinated continuum of education and that there is a **strong correlation between teacher preparation, knowledge and pedagogical skills, and student achievement**. Research dictates that early childhood is a developmental period spanning from birth through 3rd grade which requires that teachers be expressly trained to engage and appropriately instruct young learners during this unique phase of development.

Specifically, research tells us:

- State licensing structures influence how teachers are prepared. Early childhood teacher preparation programs produce candidates who engage in behaviors specifically aligned with the developmental abilities of young learners in this age/grade span. These preparation programs focus on concrete instruction, interactive, hands-on activities that foster foundational cognitive skills including emerging languages, focusing on social and emotional skill building and family engagement strategies (NCATE, New America Foundation, Foundation for Child Development, NAEYC, Kellogg Foundation).
- Gains made by children in high-quality birth-to-five programs are sustained when early learning programs and K-3rd grade systems have integrated structures including consistent instructional approaches and learning environments, and academic and social goals (Annie E. Casey Foundation). Alignment is more effectively accomplished when early childhood and early elementary teachers have similar preparation in using and adapting curricula, assessments and learning guidelines with young children (Getting in Sync, New America Foundation).
- Without knowing about the *past* and the *future* (the precursors to children's current development and learning and the trajectory they will follow in later years), teachers cannot design effective learning opportunities within their specific professional assignment. Teachers must have knowledge of development and learning across the birth-through-age-8 range; should be familiar with appropriate curriculum and assessment approaches across that age span; and should have in-depth knowledge and skills in at least two of the three periods: infants/toddlers, preschool/prekindergarten, and early primary grades.

State & National Validation for a Birth to Age Eight Continuum:

The following government agencies, state organizations, professional associations, research bodies and philanthropic foundations are among those that recognize the early childhood continuum as including birth to age eight or 3rd grade.

- United States Department of Education
- Senate Bill 1677 – Continuum of Learning Act 2011
- American Federation of Teachers
- Education Commission of the States
- Foundation for Child Development
- Illinois Early Learning Council
- Illinois P-20 Council

- Kellogg Foundation
- National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
- National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE)
- National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP)
- New America Foundation
- Pew Research Center

Illinois is at a critical juncture and has the opportunity to restructure and align our teacher certification system with what research now tells us will best prepare teachers to get the results our education system demands for students. We appreciate your serious consideration of this recommendation as the Illinois State Board of Education moves forward with the restructuring process.