

Joint Statement of Early Childhood Health and Education Professionals on the Common Core Standards Initiative

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WE HAVE GRAVE CONCERNS about the core standards for young children now being written by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers. The draft standards made public in January conflict with compelling new research in cognitive science, neuroscience, child development, and early childhood education about how young children learn, what they need to learn, and how best to teach them in kindergarten and the early grades.

We have no doubt that promoting language and mathematics is crucial to closing the achievement gap. As written, however, the proposed standards raise the following concerns:

- *Such standards will lead to long hours of instruction in literacy and math.* Young children learn best in active, hands-on ways and in the context of meaningful real-life experiences. New research shows that didactic instruction of discrete reading and math skills has already pushed play-based learning out of many kindergartens. But the current proposal goes well beyond most existing state standards in requiring, for example, that every kindergartner be able to write “all upper- and lowercase letters” and “read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension.”
- *They will lead to inappropriate standardized testing.* Current state standards for young children have led to the heavy use of standardized tests in kindergarten and the lower grades, despite their unreliability for assessing children under age eight. The proposed core standards will intensify inappropriate testing in place of broader observational assessments that better serve young children’s needs.
- *Didactic instruction and testing will crowd out other important areas of learning.* Young children’s learning must go beyond literacy and math. They need to learn about families and communities, to take on challenges, and to develop social, emotional, problem-solving, self-regulation, and perspective-taking skills. Overuse of didactic instruction and testing cuts off children’s initiative, curiosity, and imagination, limiting their later engagement in school and the workplace, not to mention responsible citizenship. And it interferes with the growth of healthy bodies and essential sensory and motor skills—all best developed through playful and active hands-on learning.
- *There is little evidence that such standards for young children lead to later success.* While an introduction to books in early childhood is vital, research on the links between the intensive teaching of discrete reading skills in kindergarten and later success is inconclusive at best. Many of the countries with top-performing high-school students do not begin formal

schooling until age six or seven. We must test these ideas more thoroughly before establishing nationwide policies and practices.

We therefore call on the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers to suspend their current drafting of standards for children in kindergarten through grade three.

We further call for the creation of a consortium of early childhood researchers, developmental psychologists, pediatricians, cognitive scientists, master teachers, and school leaders to develop comprehensive guidelines for effective early care and teaching that recognize the right of every child to a healthy start in life and a developmentally appropriate education.

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