

Child and Family Protection Association

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Zero to Five Plan Doesn't Add Up

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To no one's surprise, President Obama plans to ask Congress to spend billions of dollars on public education. As he stated in his presidential agenda on education, the country cannot afford four more years of neglect and indifference. This neglect and indifference, according to the president, occurred despite the fact that in the last four years, the federal government and the states have spent more money on public education than at any other time in the history of our nation.

What is surprising about Mr. Obama's education initiative is his priority on early childhood education. His "Zero to Five Plan" targets early care, beginning with infants. States will be given grants to begin moving toward universal preschool and government monitoring and interfering with families beginning at the birth of every child.

The presumption by Mr. Obama is that the earlier children start formal education, the

better chance they have of being successful in life and being competitive in the global market. Sounds good, but is this policy backed by evidence that government involvement in child rearing from birth actually works?

The answer is "No!" In a 2005 Stanford University/University of California study that focused on children attending preschool, it was confirmed that attendance in preschool centers, even for short periods of time each week, hindered the rate at which young children developed social skills. These findings refuted the assertion by many that for children to develop socially, they must be involved in a classroom setting at a very early age.

The Southwest Policy Institute concluded: "Contrary to common belief, early institutional schooling can harm children emotionally, intellectually and socially, and may later lead to greater peer dependency."

Child psychologist and author David Elkind, who has researched early childhood education, wrote: “When we instruct children in academic subjects ... at too early an age, we miseducate them; we put them at risk for a short-term stress and long-term personality damage. ... There is no evidence that such early instruction has lasting benefits, and considerable evidence that it can do lasting harm.”

If the government schools can't successfully educate children in 10 to 12 years (some states' compulsory attendance laws end at age 16, although many states require attendance until 17), then why should we believe they would be any more successful if they add four or five years of more government programs?

One group that has seen the benefits of spending more time together as a family is home-schoolers. Most home-school families have firsthand experience that the research studies are right. The Zero to Five Plan will encourage less parental involvement and much more government intervention and control, especially if states provide a free preschool experience for every child.

Some may say, “But it is not mandatory. Parents that don't want their children attending preschool don't have to.” Unfortunately, when the government becomes involved in a voluntary program,

too many times it ends up being mandatory. This kind of incrementalism is an often-used strategy of government-knows-best advocates.

The proper place for this issue to be discussed and decided is within the state legislatures. When Congress became involved in funding public education, the assumption was that the states were not competent to figure out how to provide an education system for the people in their states. However, since Congress became involved in funding public schools, the quality of education has steadily declined.

Focusing the federal government on its constitutional responsibilities and removing it from education policymaking would do two things. First, it would save taxpayers billions by eliminating the federal education bureaucracy. Second, it would help Congress and the president focus on their constitutionally-mandated responsibilities.

Funding the Zero to Five Plan not only is more wasteful spending the country can ill afford, but also endangers the healthy emotional and academic development of children.

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