

## **A Treatise on Essential Early Care and Education**

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**January 2021**

After being in the early care and education (ECE) field for approximately a half century, I want to propose a radical departure from how we have designed our ECE systems. Many national organizations have been suggesting that we take this time because of the COVID19 pandemic and rethink how we want to bring ECE back online building a newer and better system. We do have a unique opportunity to do this since we have lost approximately 25% of ECE as of this writing. However, I am sure what I am about to suggest is not what many of my ECE colleagues had in mind.

It is ironic because what I am proposing is very similar to an idea I had and even proposed to a federal agency practically 50 years ago. It starts with rank ordering the need of ECE and thinking of offering ECE only on an essential basis. By essential I mean for those parent(s) who only really need and want to have ECE services. For those who do not, let's pay them a stipend to stay at home with their child(ren). And this can be either mom or dad. I have not had the opportunity to run the numbers, but I am guessing that my suggestion of providing stay at home stipends could be paid for by the reduction in total need for ECE services since we would definitely see a reduction in the total need for ECE as it relates to out-of-home care. So this could be a cost neutral program.

So rather than trying to replace the 25% we have lost in ECE programs and replacing them with a higher quality version, let's totally think outside-the-box and ask parents if they really want those services or would they prefer to stay at home and raise their children in their own homes. The remaining 75% of ECE programs still will need a quality booster-shot because by best estimates prior to the COVID19 pandemic, only 10% of ECE programs were of a high-quality level.

I know that this is a radical departure from our present thinking both within the ECE advocacy community and I am sure within political circles, but maybe this is exactly the type of proposal we need to reinvent ECE. I know this is not going to be a popular idea but I want to get us thinking more broadly because the thinking so far appears to be centered on fixing an already broken system but mostly staying within the confines of that broken system. Let's really reinvent ourselves and ask parents what they want and need rather than ECE "experts" trying to make this decision for them.