

What They Gave Was More Than \$1 Billion

HOW THE WHITE HOUSE ANNOUNCEMENT OF PUBLIC-PRIVATE INVESTMENTS INDICATES A SHIFT IN THINKING

By Teri Talan

In case anyone has missed the news, yesterday was a really big day for those of us who are passionate about the well-being of children and committed to ensuring access for all children to high quality early learning opportunities. In fact, my feet have not touched the ground since I learned of the extraordinary public-private investments announced yesterday at the White House Summit on Early Education.

Here are the facts.

- The Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, and Health and Human Services Secretary, Sylvia Burwell, announced that 18 states have been awarded grants, totaling more than \$226 million, under the Preschool Development Grants program.
- From the 36 applications the departments received, five states will be awarded development grants: Alabama, Arizona, Hawaii, Montana, and Nevada.
- Thirteen states will receive expansion grants: Arkansas, Connecticut, Illinois, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Vermont, and Virginia.

The announcement of the recipients of the Preschool Development Grants was only one part of the good news shared. President Obama announced more than \$1 billion in new federal and private sector investments in early childhood education during yesterday's White House Summit. The announcements include: Up to \$750 million in new federal awards and more than \$330 million in private-sector commitments to expand the reach and enhance the quality of early education. And there is still more good news—the President also announced a new public awareness campaign called "[Invest in US.](#)" Check out the dynamic website and list of investors.

I have to acknowledge that part of my enthusiasm is that Illinois is in the group of states that will receive a four-year Preschool Development Grant and almost \$20 million in Early Head Start/Child Care Partnership awards. But this is not what most excites me. My elated state of mind is caused by the long-overdue recognition of the early years as critical learning years. In Malcolm Gladwell terms, investing in early education has "tipped" as demonstrated by the broad bipartisan support of government, business, law enforcement, and philanthropy.

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The big question for me now is will this validation of early education lead to greater respect and equitable compensation for early educators? In 1989, I wrote a letter published in the Chicago Tribune advocating for respect and worthy wages for early educators. I described my experience transitioning from 15 years of practicing law to leading a community-based early learning program. Here is an excerpt: “When I share information about my career change, people look at me with either dismay or disbelief. Their lack of regard for early care and education feels like a hard slap in the face.” Twenty-five years later, I am still working on early childhood workforce issues.

But today I am hopeful. The White House Summit on Early Education is a truly historic event. Let’s make sure it leads to investments in those who provide early education as well as the young children and families they serve.

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