

**Transcript: Early Childhood Updates: Funding and Reauthorization Prospects  
December 15, 2011**

**HELEN BLANK:** Hi. This is Helen Blank and welcome to today's audio call, *Early Childhood Updates: Funding and Reauthorization Prospects*. Due to the large number of registered participants, callers' telephone lines will be muted during the conference. If you'd like to ask a question, please e-mail your question to [achannon@nwlc.org](mailto:achannon@nwlc.org). Questions may be submitted at any time during the call.

We have four speakers today with a big agenda of six important developments. We'll talk about the state of the overall budget, FY2012 appropriations as they impact early childhood, which is good news, the state of the FY2013 budget, the status of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) reauthorization and issues in the Senate bill that impact early childhood, the status of reauthorization plans for the Child Care and Development Block Grant, and the status of the competition for Race to the Top--Early Learning Challenge grants. Joining me are Adele Robinson, Deputy Executive Director for Public Policy and Public Affairs at NAEYC, who will focus on ESEA, Hannah Matthews, the Director of Child Care and Early Education at CLASP, who will talk about CCDBG reauthorization, and Harriet Dichter, National Director of the First Five Years Fund, who will discuss the RTT-Early Learning Challenge.

I'll be starting off by talking about the FY12 and FY13 funding and budget issues. As you know, the situation around the budget is very fluid and not very encouraging for the long term. The Supercommittee that was created by last summer's Budget Control Act failed to reach agreement on a strategy for achieving \$1.2 trillion in savings over a decade. As a result, we now face something that we have talked about before, called sequestration. This process would trigger automatic cuts of \$1.2 trillion over a 10 year period. The first round of cuts is now slated to take effect beginning January 2013. That is calendar year 2013, not fiscal year.

By law, specific percentage cuts will be applied to a number of categories of federal spending. As estimated by the Congressional Budget Office, defense programs will be cut by \$454 billion over 10 years, a 10 percent cut in 2013, declining to 8.5 percent in 2021. Non-defense appropriations, including Head Start, WIC, the discretionary portion of child care funding, about \$2.2 billion, would be cut a total of \$294 billion with percentage cuts from about 8 to 9 percent in 2013 down to 5.5% in 2021.

The first round of cuts would be made through across the board proportional reductions in the new funding provided for each program. Low-income mandatory programs, such as TANF, food stamps or SNAP, child nutrition, including the Child and Adult Care Food Program, child health, and a mandatory portion of child care are exempt from the automatic cuts. Veteran's medical care and Pell grants are discretionary programs that are also exempt from the cuts.

Child care is unusual in that it is funded in two ways, mandatory and discretionary. And that is beneficial under this scenario. After 2013, non-defense discretionary cuts will be accomplished

through the normal appropriations process-- program by program, but will have to sit within tight caps for non-defense appropriations. Pell grants will have no special status in this round of cuts.

As you know there has been discussion around the possibility of exempting the defense cuts from sequestration. If this happens, it would result in even deeper cuts in domestic programs. The president has said he would oppose efforts by Congress to back out of any parts of the sequestering and urges them to find a more responsible way to reduce deficits.

Advocates are working on how to cope with the potential sequester, but luckily, it's somewhat early in the process. And we're not at all sure how it will unfold, since we have an entire year before it is due to take effect.

Efforts might be made to ensure that defense programs are not exempt from across the board cuts. We urge you to follow alerts around this issue. A sequester could also be revoked or the time period for a decision extended. It's all quite murky now.

A number of you participated by phone in meetings that the Coalition on Human Needs coordinated on the Supercommittee debate. We were grateful for your willingness to be a part of this process and share the gaps in early childhood in your states and communities. We're going to continue working hard to let Congress know how important these programs are and how harmful cuts would be.

Meanwhile, Congress is, as we speak, in the midst of passing a budget for FY 2012, the current fiscal year, which began in October. Right now, we're operating under a Continuing Resolution for the appropriations bill that affects early childhood and school age programs. And it expires tomorrow, December 16<sup>th</sup>. But we're in a pretty good place. The Senate had marked up a bill and increased Head Start funding by \$340 billion, left CCDBG funding flat, and had \$700 million for Race for the Top, some of which could be used for a second round of early learning challenge grants.

The House never went through a formal process to mark up a bill. Their chairman, Representative Rehberg, released an unofficial bill that increased Head Start by \$540 million, left child care funding flat, but had no money for Race to the Top, and made cuts in many programs. We also had a number of very controversial riders or amendments on the bill. This bill never went through the regular appropriations process. It was never marked up. Even so, members have now reached agreement on the contents of a final FY 2012 appropriations bill. In a tight budget situation, the numbers that we got today for early childhood advocates give us something to cheer about.

Head Start was increased by \$424 million, which will allow the programs that were started with ARRA funds to remain open, something we were concerned about. Child care received a small increase, an additional \$60 million. Race to the Top received \$550 million, less than last year's \$700 million. The bill has a Statement of Managers, which indicates that they expect a robust early childhood component from Race to the Top. Title I was increased by \$60 million. They'll be a slight across the board cut of .189 in these programs, possibly a little more after we see the final bill.

Up until this call, the bill's passage was caught up in debates about the extension of a payroll tax bill. But the breaking news gives us the sense that both parties are moving on disagreements, both around the appropriate bills and the extension of the payroll tax and provisions around unemployment. It is possible that we see a final appropriations bill passed and enacted into law today or tomorrow.

If this breaking news does not come to pass, which is of course possible, we could say an extension of the continuing resolution or CR for a certain time period. But the news this afternoon is quite good. And the news on early childhood is also quite good.

At the same time, the administration is working on its budget proposal for FY 2013, which the President releases in early February. It promises to be very lean. We're all urging the administration to include increases in funding for Head Start and CCDBG, and to support another round of Early Learning Challenge grants.

There will be a call in day this Monday. There's a lot going on, but remember that call in day, Monday, December 19<sup>th</sup> to urge the White House to support these increases that we will talk about later and explain what we'd like to have you do.

Adele, can you now move us to the status of the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and how the Senate version would impact early childhood?

**ADELE ROBINSON:** Hi, everyone and thank you for everyone on the call. You may have been following the committee mark up of ESEA in the Senate, chaired by Tom Harkin of Iowa. It's a nearly 800 plus page bill, which includes numerous references to early childhood.

Now as you know from our previous call, all of the big ESEA programs since 1965 or since their creation could be used for programs and services for children as young as one, but few school districts were making use of that option in the past.

Now we have more explicit direction and encouragement in the bill marked up in the Senate Committee, taking a large part from Senator Casey's Continuum of Learning Act. These are not mandates to do certain things. That wouldn't work in this kind of fiscal and policy environment. But the inclusion of these early childhood policies does move forward a child development approach in standards, teaching, and learning support for the future.

So I'm going to go over some of the aspects of the Senate's approach that are new to the law. In its Title I plan, the State Department of Education must coordinate on its plans with the state early childhood advisory committee. At the local level, local school districts must consult with early childhood representatives on their Title I plan.

In Title II, which is about professional development, there's an explicit reference to using Title II funds for joint professional development between community providers and schools.

Third, regarding to the coordination section of the bill, reference to the Head Start MOU between Head Start and school districts, which mirror the Head Start language in 2007.

Fourth, the bill will incorporate two signature initiatives into ESEA. Promise Neighborhoods and Race to the Top. The Secretary would be able at his discretion to use Race to the Top funds for early learning, with joint administration with HHS with the same goals stated as the current Early Learning Challenge Fund, which I know you all know this, but it bears repeating: it's to create a system as well as services to meet the needs of low-income and disadvantaged children.

We still have some elements that we did not get into the marked-up bill. For example, we didn't get in language to ask states to review and refine their birth through third grade standards to address all domains and be based in child development. It also doesn't include the ready school's language of the bill by Senator Sherrod Brown and Senator Kay Hagan.

So now let's turn to timing. We used to think the Senate will go to the floor in January, but that seems less likely although it could still happen. Meanwhile, a reminder that in the House, Representative Hirono led a bipartisan bill introduction which is essentially the same as the Casey bill, plus the Hagan-Brown bill combined, also called the Continuum of Learning Act.

However, the House Chairman, John Kline of Minnesota, is handling ESEA reauthorization very differently than the Senate. He is splitting up the ESEA into parts, rather than one big reauthorization bill. He is very focused on more flexibility with different ESEA funds, charter schools, and other aspects. And it's unclear at this point to what extent he will favor the same elements for early childhood to be in the House version that became part of the Senate markup.

So, again, we expect some Senate action, but not sure when. We are waiting to see when the House will move its remaining parts of ESEA.

**BLANK:** Thanks Adele. Hannah is now going to talk about activities around the reauthorization of CCDBG.

**HANNAH MATTHEWS:** Thanks, Helen and hello to everyone on the call. Well, it's now been 15 years since CCDBG has been reauthorized. The last time was during the peak of welfare reform in 1996. But now we have a new chairperson of the Subcommittee for Children and Families in the Senate, Senator Barbara Mikulski from Maryland. And she has expressed interest in moving a bill forward to reauthorize CCDBG.

The ranking member of the Subcommittee, North Carolina Senator Richard Burr, had also expressed his interest. Over the past year, Senator Mikulski has held two hearings on early childhood. A group of national organizations that came together to develop the Agenda for Affordable High Quality Child Care, some of you might know that as the child care vision. We've also been working to pull together a more modest blueprint based on this agenda, and taking into account as well some of our increased knowledge and perspective since the agenda was created several years ago.

We plan to discuss with the committee a number of requirements for the bill relating to health, safety, and quality provisions and approaches. This includes items such as requiring inspections for child care programs, training for providers, a stronger professional development system, and background check requirements.

We also plan to discuss strategies to encourage higher quality care in low income areas, improved child care assistance policies, ones that would make it easier for families to keep subsidies, ones that would encourage continuity of care for children, as well as developmental screening and better coordination between child care and Head Start and state prekindergarten.

We also think there are important areas for research, including how to develop a better way to link rates, and quality for those receiving CCDBG funds. We plan to discuss assurances that states do not cut back on the number of children currently receiving child care assistance or the rates currently paid to child care providers, given that there is so much unmet need and rates are unacceptably low.

Finally, we are saying that more resources are needed to support this important program. At this stage, it is not clear whether there is interest on the House side in moving a child care reauthorization bill. We are focusing our efforts on conversations with the Senate staff. It's also unclear what funds may be available for a reauthorization, given the overall budget and the climate in Congress, as Helen has discussed, and of course, add to it the fact that we will be in an election year, this complicates matters even further.

**BLANK:** Thanks, Hannah. Harriet is now going to talk about the status of the Early Learning Challenge grants and support to both states that have obtained grants, as well as other states that have laid out ambitious plans for improvement.

**HARRIET DICHTER:** Thanks, Helen and thank you, everyone for dialing in to listen today. We have seen just an incredible interest in the Early Learning Challenge. It was a really hard application and the states had only eight weeks to complete it. So in that context, having 35 states and the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico complete the application is really an amazing feat. And so, I offer my congratulations to anyone on the call participating in your own state process. As many people probably know, the White House will be hosting an event tomorrow at which Secretary Duncan and Secretary Sebelius will be letting us know who will receive this first round of awards. We don't have any inside scoop to share about who will be receiving the first round of awards, but we do know that the official announcement is slated for tomorrow morning. And they'll be live streaming of that, so that everyone will be able to see around the country, not just those who are in the auditorium in Washington, D.C. So we have Round One, 37 applications, with a really healthy degree of interest. And, you know, a level of demand far beyond the dollars that are available to us.

I'm going to flip to Round Two. Helen mentioned at the outset of the call that the appropriations process looks like it's going well in our favor in terms of the federal government being able to post a second round of an early learning challenge. There is a proposed \$550 million that would be available for Race to the Top, which is of course the vehicle that was used for the Early Learning Challenge competition that's now coming to a close. And there will be an opportunity with the new Race to the Top money for the administration to decide to hold an early learning challenge competition as part of the new Race to the Top money. The exact nature of that, we don't know yet, but there is good opportunity and agreement that some portion of the money will go to early learning in this next competition. We will ask you to remember as advocates that originally, the administration had asked for \$350 million for a round two early learning challenge.

We know that we will not be able to get all of the \$550 million, but hopefully, the great demand from the states will allow there to be a good healthy share of resources for a next round.

Going back to the first round that will be announced tomorrow, I want to share some fast facts about the applications that were turned in. These fast facts help us to understand how much the states are seeing and understanding the comprehensive needs of our children in the early learning sphere. States did have to make choices in these applications about their focus for the challenge. And here are some of the trend lines across the 37 applications. All states had to address the quality rating and improvement system since that was an absolute must for the competition. Thirty or more of the states applying elected to address the early learning standards section, both sections on workforce, kindergarten assessment, and data systems. So that's a pretty comprehensive approach there on some core elements of an early learning system.

27 states, that's about 70 percent of the applicant pool, also included comprehensive assessment as something they planned to tackle. And then, finally, we saw the smallest categories of choices, which turns out to be between 18 and 24 states selecting to include a focus on health, mental health, behavioral health, family engagement, K-12 linkages, and private sector involvement.

The states are really pushing themselves and creating innovation within their states, as well as actually pushing out some new ideas for everyone in the country through their early learning challenge.

And finally, I just want to note that we do see across these applications some states seeking ways to work with other states to develop joint projects, to be able to leverage their ideas and work in multi state ways to try to be efficient in using their resources, and to really make a greater impact in terms of a challenge and the opportunities for children in communities around the country.

We'll have to stay tuned for the official announcements on Friday in terms of who is selected in this first round. And then, you know, going back to what Helen said, as Congress works to firm up the fiscal year '12 budget, that we'll look forward to seeing the appropriation for Race to the Top include an opportunity for the Early Learning Challenge. We can then work to secure some resources for Round Two for the Challenge. And finally, let's not forget we are going to have to advocate for inclusion of what we hope then would be Round Three in the fiscal year '13 budget proposals.

Thank you, Helen.

**BLANK:** Thanks, Harriet. As you can all see, this is an exciting time, especially today and tomorrow, and a challenging time. There's great interest in early learning and improving children's chances of future success by investing in their early years. This coincides with the drumbeat of pressure to cut back on spending and cuts across the country in child care assistance for low income families.

It will be important for advocates to keep urging members of Congress to support improvements in early learning policies and the funding necessary to achieve them. The payoff that we get by investing in young children and the important role that child care plays in helping families work certainly justifies significant new expenditures.

It is, as we have mentioned before, equally important for advocates to point out that we cannot move forward in early learning or other key supports to families unless we also deal with support to increase revenues or taxes.

A number of you have participated in a Webinar that the National Women's Law Center sponsored on how to talk about taxes. And fact sheets are available to help you make the case on our Web site. We realize that there is a lot going on. It's an election year, which makes forward movement in the Congress even more challenging. All of us including NWLC will be sending out regular updates to keep you informed about the process as things proceed. NWLC will be offering a conference call on how a 501-C3 organization can work in an election year.

We can all start by asking our colleagues and friends to call the White House this Monday, December 19, and urge them to include significant increases in funding to support early learning programs including child care, Head Start, Early Head Start, Section 619 and Part C and funding for the Early Learning Challenge in their FY 2013 budget.

You may have received alerts from organizations already. We'll send ours out on Monday morning, but please ask your networks to call in. When all those calls go to one phone line, we can really make a difference. When we ask people to call Congress, we know that we have calls going to lots of different members. But when we all call the White House, they'll hear us loud and clear.

Let's take some questions now. We've got two questions based on the funding situation. Would the 0.189% across the board cut be taken off the current baseline funding or the baseline plus increases in Head Start CCDBG and RTT? Well, first, the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge isn't in there separately. It's all appropriated as Race to the Top. And we assume the cut would come against the new funding levels.

The next question does five years of funding for the current RTT- Early Learning competition all come out of the 2011 appropriation or does part of it come from future years funding?

**ROBINSON:** It is four years of funding.

**BLANK:** Adele just pointed out it was four years. Is funding for FY 12 to FY 15 contingent on the appropriation process in each of those years? No, the grants that will be awarded on Friday are funded for all four years out of the FY 2011 appropriation.

The next question is, what has the House said about CCDBG reauthorization?

**MATTHEWS:** Well, we don't really know at this point whether there is interest in the House in moving the reauthorization forward. So the current efforts of the groups that are working on the

re authorization is focused on working in the Senate, where we know there is expressed interest to some level by Senator Mikulski and Senator Burr.

**BLANK:** There's two questions about the sequester. How does the FY '12 appropriations bill relate to the sequester? The sequester would happen if it happens based on the FY '13 appropriations bill, because it happens in calendar—in January 2013.

Someone also asked to re-explain which early learning programs are protected under the sequestration process and which might face cuts. As I said, the mandatory portion of child care, which is \$2.9 billion, is not under the sequester, nor are TANF funds. And so, all the child care that is funded out of TANF in the states would not face an automatic cut. The Child and Adult Care Food Program is also protected. Head Start, the discretionary portion of child care, which is now a little above \$2.2 billion in the newest appropriation, Race to the Top, Section 619, Part C, any program that is a discretionary program would face sequestration.

Harriet, can you talk about what the competition would look like for a second round of early learning challenge grants?

**DICHTER:** Sure, Helen. I'm happy to do that. So not surprisingly, we actually don't know the full answer to that question. We would anticipate the same framework that we saw from the first round that focused on systems, as well as services to at-risk infants, toddlers and pre-schoolers, and the provision of high quality as a baseline requirement, but the federal government, through the Departments of Education and Health and Human Services will be able to interpret this, and to advance what they think is most essential and consequential.

I think we would hope, given the exceptionally robust interest from the state in that round that is now being wrapped up and getting ready to be announced, that people would be heavily influenced basically by the acceptance of that framework, and by the embrace of that from the first round of applications.

But we will have to get through the rest of the appropriations process. And then hear, from the administration around the particulars and the specific requirements that they would have in mind for a round two.

**BLANK:** Thanks, Harriet. Who might be eligible for Early Learning Challenge grants?

**DICHTER:** Adele, I know you have looked at the language in the Senate mark-up of the ESEA reauthorization on this issue. I believe there is an option that could allow resources to go to local districts, which I guess could help to meet that need. Adele, can you reflect a little bit more on that as well?

**ROBINSON:** The Senate ESEA reauthorization around the Challenge Fund, (because remember, it was originally authorized in the fiscal year 2011 appropriations bill and was only about four lines but was a state competition ) allows states or local school districts to apply for a Race to the Top grant and also allows early learning to be one of the areas. We still think that the ELCF is a state systems program. And so, we have urged the Senate to be clear that our



preference is that states would apply and of course, would work across all the sectors, which would include schools.

**BLANK:** OK, we have another question to Hannah and me. What is the reluctance at the House to take up the CCDBG reauthorization? Seems like a huge barrier. What can state level advocates do? Will concentrating on the Senate side and moving it there then provide the impetus to the House to take it up or not?

**MATTHEWS:** Well, we would agree that it would be a challenge to work with the current House and really move a bill forward, particularly one that we would all like to see with some improvements and some resources behind it.

That said, I think that at this point, as we move forward and put some of these ideas on the table on the Senate side, advocates can continue doing what you've all been doing so well, which is keeping the drumbeat going for early childhood. And we're going to hope that we continue to raise some visibility, and hope that some—there will be some interest in the House to move forward with us on this agenda.

**BLANK:** It's a very challenging situation to get a bill through the Congress in one year. In the old days, we used to do that with Head Start. And the House is obviously a very challenging place to work now. So you do the best you can. And you hope some activity, even if it doesn't finish this year, will give Congress the impetus to eventually get a CCDBG reauthorization off the table, but it's a short year, too, because of the election. And members are going to have a lot of things on their mind, but we have to keep trying.

Somebody asked about after school and where we were with the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program. This provides about one billion dollars for after school care. CCDBG is actually a bigger source of funding for after school care than 21<sup>st</sup> Century. We've been concerned about after school care because there have been some communities, they've actually limited CCDBG to younger children. Others have contemplated the option.

And it doesn't appear that 21<sup>st</sup> Century is going to pick up the slack. There was a lot of discussion and it actually, I think, happened in the ESEA reauthorization in the Senate draft to use more of 21<sup>st</sup> Century for extending the school day, which makes it less available for consistent before and after school care. So, there's been some controversy about the purposes of 21<sup>st</sup> Century over the last year.

So, we have a challenge out there for all those children some of them quite young who need a safe place after school.

Someone also just asked what the status of Head Start competition is. And when can programs expect to hear? Adele?

**ROBINSON:** I believe they announced that the programs that had to compete would be announced in mid -December. Anybody else have other information?

**BLANK:** No, that's what we think. That just means programs will hear whether they have to be part of the competition. And then, there will be notices around the process for the competition.

A question from Eleanor Hirsch. We would be most appreciative if you would advocate on behalf of the territories for inclusion in the Early Learning Challenge. According to the original wording only the states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia are eligible to apply. I hope with a new round of funding, this could be amended.

**BLANK:** Another question from Janet Whelan Couch. Is there anything new regarding CCAMPIS child care (Child Care Access Means Parents in School) funding? This is money to help campus based child care. We believe it is about \$16 million--the same as last year.

**ROBINSON:** The advocacy around CCAMPIS has fallen off a bit. Campus based child care programs clearly need to rejigger themselves. It's just a small program. And sometimes people forget about the small programs, even though they're meaningful.

**BLANK:** All of the organizations on the call will be sending out full details when we've had a chance to look at the bill when it finally passes, and we've had a chance to look at all the specifics on funding levels. So we'll be sure to include information on CCAMPIS and other programs.

We have another question from Susan Antos from New York. Could Hannah provide more detail on the proposals that are being made to improve child care assistance policies and to ensure continuity of care in CCDBG? Before Hannah talks, let me make this clear. We're just beginning discussions with Senate staff on issues to talk about in reauthorization. So we're at a very preliminary stage, but we do have some interesting things to offer up. Hannah, do you want to talk about those?

**MATTHEWS:** Sure, I'd be happy to. First, I think it's important to point to some of the policies that the Office of Child Care has recently put out in an information memorandum on how to improve continuity for children. And so, you can see a lot of overlap, I think, between the ideas that we're discussing and those that are in the memo.

A big one is that we are really looking at urging for annual redetermination for children so that they would not have to be re-determined based on changes in parents' employment or income over the course of a year. So making CCDBG more similar to Head Start in that sense.

Some of the other things we're looking at are ways for states to mirror some of the policies of private pay parents. So covering absent days when children are absent from care, to make sure that providers continue to be reimbursed for those days. Those are some of the things that we've been looking at.

**BLANK:** We just had a clarification on Head Start, that the office of Head Start will be notifying grantees sometime this week. Any grantee with a deficiency in 2009 will be told they will need to recomplete. Applications are supposed to go out in early 2012 with the goal of having things settled and in place so that there is no interruption in service to the community for this full year. The notice got delayed from last week. So that's on the way.

Another question, this is for Adele. Is their specific language about a Title I pre-K set aside in the ESEA bill? What happened in the FY 12 appropriations bill?

**ROBINSON:** Hi, Title I was increased by \$60 million in the FY 12 appropriations bill. Remember, it's a very big program. The set aside question—well, everyone from advocates to the administration has gone around and around. And there's really no way to do a uniform set aside in 1000 districts in America with Title I money.

So rather than a set aside, there is more impetus for local school districts to use their option of using their Title I money for younger children. We've seen a lot of interest in spending more Title I money on pre-K in particular. Let's not forget that you can even do developmental screening with these funds. You can do wrap around services for part-day programs. Districts can even pay for some home visiting if you wanted to out of Title I.

But the set aside seems to be difficult to accomplish as a uniform provision, and doesn't seem to float very well.

**BLANK:** Thanks, Adele. Here's some sad news that we know. California already has significant gaps in its early learning system. Another 4 percent cut to child development programs will take place January 1, 2012 making it extremely difficult for low-income families to access high quality early learning programs.

We know that California is in very bad straits on many issues, including early care and education. We were very excited to be featured in "The New York Times" yesterday in a front page story that talked about low income mothers' challenges in accessing child care assistance and California was one of the states that was used as an example. You have some great legislators from California. George Miller is the ranking member of the House Labor Committee. Nancy Pelosi, the minority leader in the House has always said child care is one of her top issues. So we're going to keep advocating. We're going to try to get yours and other states challenges out front the best we can. It really helps if you share with us what's going on in your state.

Carol Burnett wants us to talk about their reauthorization process. She's concerned that we shouldn't push for more requirements without adequate funding to states to meet the new requirements. Can we speak to this concern?

**MATTHEWS:** Carol, we share your concern. Certainly, a lot—what we're doing right now is really trying to put some ideas out there, and start a conversation. An important part of that conversation is going to be letting Senators know that a lot of the elements that we think are important really do take money. And so, resources are at the top of our list for the dialogue.

**BLANK:** We felt that it was important to give them a plan that was somewhat substantial to begin with. And we do, as Hannah said, well know that these changes require additional resources.

**DICHTER:** Can I just weigh in here, too, Carol, because I—this is Harriet, you know, I want to reinforce here that, and I've said this to Helen many times, we have to actually be quite unapologetic about our factual statements around the need for additional investments.

And I know this is hard for everyone, but if you even just go back to how we started the call, where Helen wrapped up where things stand now in terms of where we think we'll end with the federal fiscal year '12 appropriations, you can see that while we have some opportunities there for more resources, we are still so very far away from the level of investment that we need, that for me, I want to be very encouraging for people to not just get ourselves too entirely in a defensive posture. It's hard because our circumstances are so difficult, but you know, our needs are very great. And they're so well substantiated in terms of the demands for the kids that we're trying to serve.

**BLANK:** I definitely agree. Thank you, Harriet. I got an e-mail from a colleague yesterday after "The New York Times" article and he said well, how can we fix this? And I said, with more money. And he said, besides that I said, well, I'm not sure there's another answer in this case for all those moms. So it is important to be clear.

Alicia Washington wanted us to clarify-- the across the board cuts are expected in the appropriations bill this Friday. Will it impact the additional children added to Head Start due to ARRA funding? I believe so, but the cuts are going to be very tiny. They're miniscule across the board cuts. So I don't think it'll upset your ability to serve your Head Start children in those ARRA classrooms at all.

Well, Jenny Rappaport out there in California just heard rumors that California got an ELC grant. Have you heard about anything this week about the winners? Harriet, Adele?

**ADELE:** No. They are keeping the results very tight. I think you should be waiting for their announcement that will happen between 10 and 11 a.m. Eastern Daylight Time tomorrow. Harriet?

**DICHTER:** I agree on that. And you can watch it live streamed, you know. And so everyone can see it officially together.

**BLANK:** And we wish you all luck. And we wish there was more money in the competition. That looks like all the questions we have time for today. Thanks, Hannah. Thanks, Adele. Thank you, Harriet. Thank you, everyone for joining us today.

All participants in today's call will receive an e-mail in the next few days with an audio file and links to additional information about the budget and appropriations process. We'll also be putting a written transcript on our Web site, and others will too. If you have additional questions, please feel free to send them to us at [Hblank@nwlc.org](mailto:Hblank@nwlc.org). And I'll share them with Hannah, Harriet, and Adele. And we'll answer them to the best of our ability.

Here's a quick one. For everyone on the panel, what would you say was the most significant development in early learning during 2011? And what are you anticipating in 2012? Who wants to go first? What's the most significant development in early learning during 2011? And when do you anticipate in 2012?

**ROBINSON:** I'll be pretty broad about it. I think as a community, you have done an extraordinary job in some of the worst fiscal times not only being sometimes flat funded, but also winning increases in child care, Head Start, and the Early Learning Challenge Fund. Many important programs have actually been cut. Somehow, we've been able to move the interest in early care to achieve a little more political will. So that's my biggest takeaway. You've done an amazing job. And it's really impressive to see how all of that works, even though it feels like small numbers, it's really big in the total scheme of things.

**BLANK:** I agree with Adele. As I walk around the office, everyone says oh, my goodness, how did that happen? So, if you look at what's going on across the Congress, I think you should all congratulate yourselves for your hard work.

**DICHTER:** I agree with that. I just want to add one more thing, because I do think it is amazing, given the difficulty the environment, basically, where the resource investment or—has been able to move for early learning, not to say that we don't have a lot more work to do, but the fact is everyone's work around the country is very important.

The second thing that I would want to add is about having this first run of the Challenge out there. Now, we've had the first opportunity very clearly for the two federal agencies, Education and HHS together, to articulate an early learning framework. And that early learning framework came from state leadership. It came from the incredible work people have been doing in their communities around the country. And so, it's great from my point of view to sort of see that kind of call and response and to have a frame that is put out, that is really building on incredible work that people have been doing and creating in their home communities and home states.

**MATTHEWS:** Thanks, Harriet. Yes, and you know, I think Adele put it perfectly. And I hope that given how well we've come out in 2011 and 2012 in these tough times, I hope we all continue working this hard, and can have the same exciting news to share in 2013.

**BLANK:** Well, Hannah, that fits right into what you all have to do on Monday. Have everyone you know call the White House this Monday to ask for significant increases for funding for early learning. The federal agencies have been told they have to make significant cuts but they have not put this budget to bed. They need to hear from us.

Also, remember that your members of Congress will be home for a month-long Christmas recess. It's a good time to encourage members to visit early childhood programs. It's important to keep it up. Even if they've turned you down before, ask again. Again and again, we thank all of you for the work that you do every day for children and families. As we just said, we continue to be successful in increasing policymakers' awareness about the importance of the early years. And we have to keep pushing forward, even in these very complex times. Children only have one chance at a high quality early childhood experience. It's our job to make the case now. Have a wonderful holiday season and stay in touch. Thank you all.

**END**