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August 20, 2004

The Honorable Deirdre Alpert
Chair, Conference Committee to Develop a Master Plan for Education
1020 N. Street, Suite 560
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Comments on the implementation of AB 56 (Steinberg, Chan, Daucher, Liu), an act relating to child preschool programs

Dear Senator Alpert:

On behalf of the National Council of La Raza (NCLR), the largest national Latino civil rights organization in the U.S., and the Early Care and Education Taskforce of the California NCLR Affiliate Network (CNAN), we write on an issue of great importance to the Latino community: the education of its young children. NCLR and CNAN strongly support the development of a high-quality preschool system in California, and view the Committee's consideration of AB 56 as an important opportunity to improve the academic outcomes and life success of all children, particularly Latino and English language learner (ELL) children.

As you are aware, Latino children constitute the fastest-growing population in the state. In fact, researchers noted (earlier this year) that more than one out of every two babies born in California is Latino. In addition, the state's young child population is increasingly linguistically diverse. During the 2002-2003 program year, 51% of children enrolled in Head Start centers throughout the state were Spanish-language-dominant, compared to 43% for English-language-dominant children.

Unfortunately, young Latino children are less likely to arrive at the kindergarten door having participated in a high-quality early education program. For example, 47% of three- and four-year-old children in California are Latino. However, fewer than 37% of these children attend preschool. In addition, early education programs often fail to address adequately the quality of early education services for Latino and ELL children, who require linguistically and culturally responsive services to meet school readiness goals.

Clearly, the success of a preschool system for California largely depends on the implementation of policies that take into account the needs of Latinos and ELLs. NCLR and CNAN believe that AB 56 takes an important first step toward the design of an inclusive preschool program. However, there are pending issues that must be addressed in order to ensure the full support and equitable participation of Latinos. We urge you to give thoughtful consideration to our recommendations, which we believe improve on the provisions outlined in AB 56 and strengthen the preschool framework to meet the needs of the growing Hispanic community.

Promote access to preschool for Latino and English-language-learner children by:

- **Including an outreach strategy, which targets Latino, immigrant, ELL, and geographically isolated families.** NCLR and CNAN strongly believe that a high priority must be placed on outreach to Latinos, immigrants, ELLs, and geographically isolated families in order to ensure an



equitable preschool system in California. *NCLR and CNAN recommend that the legislation provide financial incentives and require preschool contractors to establish a plan for outreach activities aimed at increasing the participation rates of children who have been historically underrepresented in early education programs due to language and other barriers.*

- **Ensuring that PFA programs are full-day or, at a minimum, are linked to early childhood education (ECE) services for the full day.** Research has shown that access to full-day services enhances academic outcomes and provides greater flexibility for parents, particularly Latinos. *NCLR and CNAN strongly believe that all families should have meaningful access to full-day programs regardless of geographic or socioeconomic factors. We recommend that the legislation provide resources for a community needs assessment at the county level that will inform the ratio of full-time versus part-time needs of parents seeking preschool services. These local community assessments could be incorporated into the existing work of the local planning councils and resources and referral agencies.*

Support culturally and linguistically appropriate services by:

- **Continue and expand the current mixed service delivery system of preschool services (public/private, center-based, and home-based), which leverages the expertise of community-based organizations to provide and expand PFA services, as well as training and technical assistance, for Latino and ELL children.** The community-based sector has a long history of providing early care and education services, particularly to diverse communities. However, the current state preschool system has not supported a mixed delivery system. For example, according to the California Department of Education, a mere 23% of preschool contractors are community-based providers and family child care homes (FCCHs) are entirely excluded. *NCLR and CNAN strongly believe that a mixed delivery system of PFA services supports parental choice, responds to the needs of working families, and provides Latinos with greater access to culturally and linguistically responsive preschool programs. NCLR and CNAN recommend that the legislation be explicit in its intention to ensure that the California preschool system includes community-based providers, FCCHs, and community charter schools. This will require an expansion of the system to include new community-based and FCCH providers. In addition, we believe that the preschool system should build on existing mechanisms for the distribution of preschool funds. This would mean that contract determinations be and continue to be made at the California Department of Education and awarded directly to local entities. Moreover, the California Department of Education should ensure that first priority be given to applicants in communities providing services to historically underserved and underperforming populations.*
- **Increasing the number of highly-qualified bilingual teachers and personnel with expertise in working with Latinos and ELLs.** *NCLR and CNAN strongly believe that quality instruction begins with well-prepared teachers, including teachers who possess the necessary linguistic skills demanded by an increasingly diverse child population. NCLR and CNAN recommend that the legislation set time frames for teachers to complete degree requirements based on the recommendations of the Workforce Development Blue Ribbon Committee. In addition, we believe that the legislation should require the Workforce Development Blue Ribbon Committee to advise on ways to develop a diverse ECE teacher workforce. This should include making recommendations on the creation of a career ladder program that aggressively recruits bilingual, bicultural teachers and assists instructors in receiving bilingual certification; and advising on the feasibility of providing individual waivers to staff who face language and geographic barriers and are making progress toward the teacher degree requirements. Lastly, in order to ensure that the unique needs of Latinos and ELLs be represented, the Blue Ribbon Committee members*

should reflect the diversity of the state and have experience and expertise in providing preschool services to Latinos, immigrants, and ELLs.

- **Requiring parent involvement and meaningful parent participation in PFA governance functions, in order to enhance parents' capacity as advocates for their children's development.** NCLR and CNAN strongly believe that parent involvement and decision-making is a critical component of a high-quality preschool system, particularly for Latinos. Moreover, parent involvement in early education prepares parents to be effective partners and advocates throughout their children's educational career. *NCLR and CNAN recommend that the legislation include as part of the PFA standards and guidelines a requirement that PFA programs include parents, including those who face language barriers, in decision-making and governance activities. In addition, we believe that the legislation should require that programs provide culturally and linguistically appropriate training to parents to inform them about their rights and responsibilities concerning the education of their children, to enable parents to work with schools in order to communicate with teachers and school personnel, to support the school work of their children, and to participate in decisions related to the education of their children.*
- **Ensuring educational quality for Latino and ELL children.** NCLR and CNAN believe that a high-quality preschool program for Latinos and ELLs requires a focus on the quality of instruction, appropriateness of curricula, support for home language and the acquisition of the English language, and the implementation of rigorous data collection methods to report on quality of, and access to, services for Latinos and ELLs. In addition, the preschool program should provide comprehensive health, nutrition, and family services. *NCLR and CNAN recommend that the legislation establish a statewide clearinghouse to coordinate the development and dissemination of research on Latino and ELL children and families. In addition, we believe that the California Department of Education, in conjunction with the California Department of Health and Human Services, should be tasked with the development of preschool program standards. This would help to ensure coordination with state birth-to-three services and the development of a comprehensive preschool system that includes social, emotional, and health services.*

Ensure quality of services by:

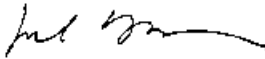
- **Establishing an ongoing system for monitoring the supply and demand of PFA throughout the state.** One reason for Latino underrepresentation in preschool is the lack of high-quality programs in Latino communities. *NCLR and CNAN strongly recommend that the legislation require the California Department of Education to administer, allocate, and monitor whether or not preschool programs are expanded and created in communities experiencing a large demand and short supply of these programs, and report to the legislature on its findings.*
- **Providing resources necessary for facility renovation and/or acquisition, with priority for underserved and underperforming neighborhoods.** NCLR and CNAN believe that preschool programs should operate in facilities that are safe and conducive to learning. However, it is clear that there is currently an insufficient supply of such facilities, particularly in Latino communities. *NCLR and CNAN recommend that AB 56 provide opportunities for expanding facilities acquisition and renovation, particularly in the community-based sector.*
- **Ensuring appropriate governance and accountability mechanisms for services to Latinos and ELLs.** Given the diversity of the young child population in California, NCLR and CNAN strongly believe that a responsive and equitable preschool system should focus on the unique needs of Latino and ELL children and families. *NCLR and CNAN recommend that AB 56 require*

the California Department of Education to establish an Advisory Committee of experts and community stakeholders to monitor and make recommendations on preschool services to Latino, ELL, and immigrant populations.

In closing, NCLR and CNAN strongly urge you to ensure that funds be made available to carry out the proposed preschool services, including those outlined in our recommendations. Moreover, we would caution against imposing mandates on existing providers without making the required financial investments. We believe that this would undermine the preschool system and result in weaker services for all children, particularly Latinos.

Once again, I thank you for considering our views. NCLR is deeply interested in supporting legislation to provide California's youngest children with an opportunity to start their education careers on the right track. We look forward to working with the Legislature to shape a universal preschool program in California which leads the nation in quality of services, particularly for Latinos. If you have any questions, please contact Antonia López, NCLR's Director of Early Care and Education, at (916) 448-9852.

Sincerely,



Raúl Yzaguirre
NCLR President and CEO



Héctor Ramírez
Para Los Niños,
CNAN Education Co-Chair

On behalf of:
California Association for Bilingual Education
Community Child Care Council of Santa Clara County
MAAC Project
Spanish Speaking Council of San Joaquin County
Unity Council

cc: Members, Conference Committee to Develop a Master Plan for Education
Assembly Member Darrell Steinberg
Assembly Member Wilma Chan
Assembly Member Lynn Daucher
Assembly Member Carol Liu