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Institute for Youth, Education, and Families

Promoting School Readiness: The Challenge of Reaching ALL Children
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Speakers:

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Resources, Minneapolis, Minn.; and
Amy O’Leary, director, Massachusetts Early Education for All Campaign, Boston, Mass.

GOLDBERG: Good afternoon everyone. My name is Heidi Goldberg and I am the program director for early childhood and family economic success at the Institute for Youth, Education, and Families (YEF Institute) at the National League of Cities (NLC). I am delighted that you can join us this afternoon for this audioconference which is called “Promoting School Readiness: The Challenge of Reaching All Children.” We are very pleased to be able to share with you for the next hour some innovative strategies that cities are employing to reach children from diverse cultural and economic backgrounds and help prepare them to enter school ready to learn and succeed.

As many of you know, school readiness begins in the very early years, long before a child enters kindergarten, and a wide body of research confirms that when young children have access to quality educational experiences early on they are much more likely to succeed in grade school, high school, and beyond. However, unfortunately not all children have these opportunities and many children begin their formal schooling already behind the learning curve of their peers, and when that happens they are rarely able to catch up. In recent years the percentage of young children in families in which both parents work has grown to over 60 percent. These families depend on a broad range of child care arrangements including child care centers, provider’s homes, and care from family, friends, and neighbors in more informal settings, which often is referred to as FFN care. Many of these informal care providers lack the resources necessary to provide children with these crucial early educational experiences. So increasingly, city leaders are starting to recognize that by promoting the importance of school readiness and supporting early learning initiatives for their youngest residents – including those who are the most difficult to reach – they can help close these achievement gaps so that all

children can get a strong head start in their education. These efforts have potential to strengthen families and consequently boost the overall well being of communities.

Today I have with me three speakers, one of whom is a little bit delayed and not here yet, but we will soon have three speakers who will discuss innovative school readiness strategies to reach all children at the local level. I hope that you will make note of any questions that come up and feel free to email those questions to Michael Karpman at karpman@nlc.org. You can also hold on to your questions and then ask them over the line at a little past 3:00 when we open up the lines for Q&A.

So I want to introduce the speakers that we have on the call today. First I would like to introduce Betty Emarita. Betty is a change management consultant and president of Development and Training Resources which is a firm she established in 1986. Betty works with a variety of entities including nonprofit organizations and foundations to help them absorb new information, manage change, and move concepts to action. Betty has an extensive knowledge of the dynamics of family, friend, and neighbor care. She has developed and co-wrote curriculum guides for home visitation to FFN caregivers, and also researched and wrote a nationally cited report on best practices among FFN caregivers in five cultural communities. Betty would you like to say hello to our callers?

EMARITA: Well it is such a pleasure for me to be a part of this conversation, and I am very much looking forward to hearing what the audience has to say as well as my colleagues.

GOLDBERG: Wonderful. We are excited to hear what you have to say too. Next we have Amy O’Leary. Amy directs the Early Education for All campaign which is the primary public advocacy initiative of Strategies for Children in Boston, Massachusetts. Launched in the summer of 2000, the campaign is a coalition of leaders from the business, early childhood, labor, religion, healthcare, education, and philanthropy sectors working to ensure that publicly funded high-quality early education is available to all young children in the state. As director of the campaign, Amy manages advocacy, constituency, awareness building, and policy development efforts. Amy would you like to say hello?

O’LEARY: Hi. Thanks for having me, and I look forward to our discussion.

GOLDBERG: Great. And finally our third speaker who is a little delayed and hopefully will be joining us soon is Miriam Long. Miriam is the deputy mayor for education, youth, and families in the City of Los Angeles, California. Miriam has served as key policy advisor to the L.A. county supervisor Yvonne Burke on issues related to foster care, seniors, homelessness and early childhood development and childcare. In her role as deputy mayor for education, youth, and families, which is a new role for her, Miriam oversees education issues and services for children and families in the city. She also serves as a top-level liaison with several city departments including the Department of Recreation and Parks, Disability and Cultural Affairs, the Commission on Children and Youth and Their Families, and other departments as well. We will introduce her when she joins us.

So with that I would like to begin our discussion. First I would like to start with this idea of reaching all children and you will see in the description of this audioconference, the “all” was capitalized for a reason. So Betty, I think it would be helpful if we start with you and frame the

topic by giving us a sense from your research and your work with caregivers of who is being left out of that “all.” Who are the children that are hardest to reach in the U.S. today?

EMARITA: Well, you know, I would like to first to think about the term “reaching children” in a very broad manner. In 2005, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, 45 percent of children under four years of age were children of color. That is a profound shift in our population. In addition, according to the Annie E. Casey Foundation 2007 Kids Count report, 40 percent of children are growing up in low-income families, and by that I mean 200 percent of poverty for a family of four, which is around \$42,000. Now by 2020, these children will be entering the work force and we will be depending upon their skills and their paychecks to help fuel our economy and support our tax base. This makes reaching them – and by that I mean not just knowing where they are but actually engaging in a very meaningful way the children, their families and the communities of which they are part. Our collective future really rests on the shoulders of these children.

GOLDBERG: Right. And maybe you can tell us a little bit about what you think some of the unique needs of these children are in regards to school readiness and some of the barriers that prevent them from entering school ready to learn.

EMARITA: Most families want what is best for their children regardless of race, class, or ethnicity. And often we have a misalignment between what families and children need and public services. Often families are daunted by bureaucracies and silos; the structures often have unintended consequences. For example, many children of color are in family, friend, and neighbor care, which is your informal care, usually delivered in the home of the caregiver. Families chose family, friend, and neighbor care for a variety of reasons – cultural values, trust, relationship with the caregiver, convenience, cost, access – and in this economy a growing number of families are choosing family, friend and neighbor care.

There have been some concerns about quality, and of course you have high-quality and low-quality care in every setting, so family, friend, and neighbor care is not an exception. One concern about family, friend, and neighbor care has been – and I am giving this as an example of the kinds of new limbs that we might need to use when we are trying to assess how to reach children and how to reach the families that care for them. One concern about family, friend, and neighbor care has been caregiver isolation – that caregivers may be in homes where they are not able to get out very much. They don’t have access to information that will help children prepare for school. Now the question is, is this only a problem with the caregiver or is it also a problem that has other facets? For example, public transportation. Is public transportation available and is it affordable? Are there parks nearby and if there are, are those parks safe? Is this an issue of public safety as well as transportation? Are there libraries, other places that caregivers can go to get information that would be helpful or useful to them?

It is interesting how it is the interface between the systems that we have in place and the caregivers who are in informal settings. This is a very personal move for me in a lot of ways as I have experienced this up close and personal. When I had three young children and I had been in a car accident, I was totally dependent upon my family and my community to get me places so a lot of times it is how we think through ways to interface with the different kinds of social networks that people are a part of – their family networks and their communities, and the

support available through public agencies that can really make a difference in whether or not the needs of children in these families are met.

GOLDBERG: Right. It sounds like there are just so many different types of components to be thinking about when you are thinking about designing programs and policies to reach and engage families.

EMARITA: Yes, and I think one thing to keep in mind is that often we use a deficit lens when we think about especially low-income children and children of color, and if we can also remember that sometimes the information that we receive is inadequate. Data on young children, particularly children of color, frequently enters public data bases through social services, health and child protection agencies, and for children of color and low-income children this information is seldom counterbalanced by asset-based data that reflect the strength of these children, their families, and their communities.

GOLDBERG: Right. Now shifting now to thinking about what states and cities can do on a practical level, let's talk now about Massachusetts. Amy your work focuses more on a universal approach. Could you talk briefly about the goals of the Early Education for All campaign in Massachusetts and your work to reach all children in Massachusetts, and particularly emphasizing what local leaders are doing in the state of Massachusetts as well at the city level?

O'LEARY: Sure. As you mentioned the Early Education for All campaign is a coalition of 52 leaders from all different sectors working to ensure high quality early education for children. And our goals are to ensure that there is a voluntary universally accessible high-quality pre-kindergarten program delivered through a mix of public and private programs; that there is voluntary universally accessible high-quality full school day public kindergarten for every child and family who wants it; and to really develop a statewide system of high-quality early education care for all children starting at birth, and then a statewide system to improve the training, education, and compensation of the early childhood workforce. We have engaged in strategies to get our work done including working with influential unlikely allies, building the alignment among likely allies in our state, using the research to inform the policy proposals and recommendations, raising public awareness using media at the local and statewide level, and developing an independent advocacy organization.

Our work was started through a voter poll, and one of the reasons that we are focused on universal is that voters supported it overwhelmingly. In Massachusetts, 88 percent of voters agree that all children should have access to quality early education care programs and 73 percent of Massachusetts voters believe early education should be publicly funded for all children. We also know Ed Zigler, who has been often called the "father of Head Start," talks in his book about universal preschool and that middle class children need support too. He says that no one ever talks about the gap between middle class kids and poor kids or rich kids. It is true that poor kids profit more from pre-K than middle class kids, but it is like schooling in general. Would we only have schools for poor children? The other reason to really look at this universally is that we believe that all children deserve this opportunity of a high-quality early education experience. The research tells us that it makes a difference in short-term and long-term benefits, not just for the child or the family, but for society as a whole. We need a broad

constituency to rally around this work to use and act on the evidence that we have to further these policy proposals, you know, locally, statewide and now federally.

GOLDBERG: Those sounds like great goals that you are trying to reach there in Massachusetts and I just want to check to see if Miriam has joined us yet?

LONG: I have joined you. How are you doing?

GOLDBERG: Welcome Miriam.

LONG: Thank you.

GOLDBERG: You were already introduced and so we are just diving right into the questions now and we are in a conversation right now about this idea of reaching all children, and who is kind of left out of that equation. So if I might ask you a question now, could you describe some of the citywide school readiness initiatives underway in Las Angeles with a focus on how the city is trying to reach out to families that do not have access to early educational resources?

LONG: Yes. Los Angeles ten years ago developed something called the First Five Commission, and that was our entire state actually. It was started by Rob Reiner back when we thought Rob Reiner was going to be running for governor and he did not, but Rob Reiner came to the First Five Commission who was getting money from tobacco taxes to advocate for something called universal preschool. Universal preschool was envisioned as an opportunity for all four-year-olds in the city, county, and state of California to have access to preschool to make sure that they would all arrive at school ready to learn.

In Los Angeles county, \$800 million was allocated to this effort for Universal Preschool and what we found although at the time it sounded like a lot of money, that the need is so great that we are focused instead on poor children first in what we called “hot zones.” Hot zones were where there was the lowest academic performance and the highest poverty needs. In the long run though, the vision is to provide it for all four-year-olds – some will need to access it and some will use their own private access. When I came online I heard someone talking about the need to touch middle class students and also have wealthy students have this access too, but they don’t have the problems, obviously, that we do in the poor communities.

So over the last several years Los Angeles universal preschool has developed all kinds of programs to teach preschool service providers how to do good service provision, capacity measures, and measures for whether or not they are being effective. The main thing is because it has been such a low – the price of preschool and the affordability of preschool results in a lower level of compensation for people who want to be in this service provision that they were not necessarily attracting the best and brightest into this area. So L.A. UP, which is what we call it, L.A. UP has been very active in training preschool services providers and developing facilities for these services to take place. So far we have focused on only what we call our hot zones but it is our vision to roll it out city, county, and statewide.

GOLDBERG: Now before you called in, we were having a conversation about family, friend, and neighbor care providers and this specific need that children in those informal care settings

have, and I am wondering if there are efforts underway in L.A. to reach those populations of children as well.

LONG: Well there are definitely efforts, and one of them is happening through the county of Los Angeles. We have developed a program where we are asking family service providers to volunteer to have technical assistants come into their agencies or their homes and evaluate for them exactly where their strengths are and where their strengths are not. To people who participate in this program, they give extensive training in an effort to upgrade the quality of service. A lot of people in our communities do not want their children in center-based care. Center-based care is far easier to evaluate. So since we were having this difficulty and not getting a lot of the weaker service – not weaker but the more independent service providers – the county established a program that would allow technical assistance. And that has been very successful. As a matter of fact it is oversubscribed. The more resources we put in it, the more family-based service centers are wanting to use it.

GOLDBERG: That sounds great.

EMARITA: I just wanted to add to this as an amen to what Miriam was saying. That a lot of times building on the strengths of families is so critical because a lot of the things that they are teaching children that have to do with life skills also have academic skills embedded in them. You know, household chores or doing things for younger siblings and so forth, and all of these things can be translated into academic skills if there is the engagement with those families and a bridge from the families to the schools. Home visitation programs can play such a significant role in that even in collecting information about what the strengths of families are and what their particular needs are so that those strengths can be supported in whatever particular help that they may need in places where they are struggling can also enhanced.

GOLDBERG: Right. That is true. Now all of you know that most of the participants on the call today are from cities. They are either local elected officials or staff from city agencies who may be interested in trying to encourage their local leaders to promote school readiness initiatives in their community. Clearly Mayor Villaraigosa has emphasized quality early care and education in his policy agenda and I wonder, Miriam, if you could start by speaking to what the role you see for elected officials in promoting school readiness work.

LONG: One of the ways that we have been most successful since Mayor Villaraigosa has been in office is that he actually, as a young man, was saved by education. He had gotten off track. He had dropped out of school. He had gotten in trouble and it was education that saved his life. So in every speech that he gives to young people, he tells that story and he also talks about the need for whatever your barriers are, you must learn to read and to write. So the city has resources, our libraries have resources, there are plenty of resources out there. It is just trying to connect our young people to these resources and so from the mayor's perspective, he is just a champion on every realm. He talks about it at every meeting. He talks about it with the business community. He talks about it with the evangelicals and the church communities, everywhere he goes he talks about the need so that message gets carried throughout the community and he is our education champion. It is working.

GOLDBERG: Now Amy, turning to you. Massachusetts has strong leadership also from Governor Patrick in pushing for initiatives aimed at school readiness and I wonder if you can talk about how do you help translate the state level leadership to what is happening at the local level and how are local elected officials and local leaders getting involved?

O'LEARY: In Massachusetts we have 351 cities and towns and a very strong tradition of local control especially in education. Part of the challenge of early education and care is most of the funding actually comes from the federal government through the state, so there is very little state and local funding for early education. Part of our work in the beginning of the campaign was getting out to those meetings of the communities so we could to listen to the experts, the people on the ground, to use their expertise to help inform our policy recommendations. Through our advisory committee, we engaged folks like the Massachusetts school committees, the superintendents, and the principals, and these associations represent those groups statewide as well as over 20 statewide early education officials.

We were able to present to the mayors' group of the Massachusetts Municipal Association, and at the time Mayor Claire Higgins of North Hampton was the chair, and she is a former early educator, so it was a wonderful alignment. Mayors have also hosted our large advisory committee meetings. We work with local governments to get town resolutions declaring it "the week of the young child," and really using the media to get into the local newspapers. We work with our field volunteers to do letters to the editor, to do op-eds with likely and unlikely allies paired together. We also made information available through our Web site that really resonates with leaders on the local level. We have fact sheets on over 120 cities and towns and are available to create them for each community that requests them that talk about the demographic data of their community. We also have briefs around full-day kindergarten – how high-quality early education can impact local aid and help reduce special education costs – to really talk about the message that investing in early education does give long-term benefits for children, but also for cities and towns, again using the research. We have found also using the election year is helpful. We work with our grassroots volunteers to make sure that this is an issue, not just in the statewide level races but in local communities as well.

LONG: That reminded me of something that I wanted to mention too. Yes there is a problem of "compassion burn-out" in Los Angeles, and we have been successful by framing the issue of education as an economic benefit rather than social benefit only. That has gotten the attention of people – what it costs you to not educate, what it costs you to have these people in our society that are not given access to education, and that is something that the mayor has championed and it has really resonated throughout the city.

O'LEARY: And I think to the point of being a champion, Mayor Menino in the City of Boston has been a big champion for early education and talks about early education as the one way of closing the achievement gap. So your point about the economic development, you know, with early education – in Boston they have created a public-private partnership called Thrive in Five to really develop a blueprint of what it is going to take to have ready families, ready educators, ready systems, and a ready city that will equal children's successes in life and school.

GOLDBERG: Right and Betty, I wonder if you have any advice for city leaders who are listening in who are trying to reach and support the FFN providers in their communities.

EMARITA: In these economically challenging times, you know, I am a firm believer in the kitchen table conversations, especially because we are talking about cities and local governments of very different sizes. I think building on what you have and being able to recognize the value of what you have are important, and I think for example where there are cities and towns where you might have home visiting through a health department or you have nonprofit organizations that you can enter into relationships with – those nonprofits might have very strong relationships with some of the communities that you want to reach, and I think that being able to enter into those communities in such a way that you are viewed as a partner can make a huge difference in people bringing more to the table than you even asked for. Get the quality of information that you need so that you can actually redesign services and maybe deliver them in a more cost-effective way because families are hubs of information, and they are part of social networks that extend quite far. Some of them are local networks and some of them extend nationally and internationally so they bring a wealth of resources.

I also encourage cities and towns and municipalities to use as much free information as you can, and adapt it to your needs. There is available – I think it used to be on the National League of Cities Web site – a curriculum guide for families for the neighbor care, best practice for home visitation, and the purpose of that guide was to give home visitors a template that they could adapt to their particular situation that would allow them to both give and get information that will enable caregivers to prepare children more effectively for school entry and also that would give the home visitors information that will help them tailor their programs or their visits more effectively to the needs of those caregivers. So that is available through – it was funded by the Twin Cities United Way and I think it is available also through United Way of America.

GOLDBERG: Yes, and we will ask all of you to share information about resources at the end of the call. I think we are coming close to the time where we want to open it up to questions from the participants but before we do, I just want to throw out one more question and this is a question that people are always wondering about and we always get questions about funding. I know that Amy mentioned funding earlier talking about it coming from the federal level, so I want to start by asking Miriam. Miriam we received a question from a listener earlier today, from someone asking about the impact of city budget cuts on the mayor's early education strategy.

LONG: Oh I thought that was something preplanned.

GOLDBERG: I figured you would get the question anyway if I didn't ask, but just wondering if you have seen budget cuts and how this has impacted early childhood programs?

LONG: Well for the majority of our programs that have to do with early childhood, they are not funded from the city budget. Those are funded through the county. It so happens that I was, for 12 years, deputy to a county supervisor before taking this job eight months ago, which is why I am so familiar with what is happening and the budget cuts that are threatening our kids

have more to do with the L.A. Unified School District than with the city's budget per se. So we are not funding childhood programs, and our dire straits are not spilling into that, but everyone else's are – the county and the Unified School District.

GOLDBERG: This is a question that any of you can answer but I think our listeners would be interested to hear about ideas that you have for strategies for funding school readiness initiatives in local communities.

O'LEARY: Well I should have said earlier about that funding coming from the federal government, that is the public funding. Most of the cost of early education falls to the parents and I think in these budget times – in Massachusetts our budget starts July 1 – I think we are going to see parents and families who are having a hard time paying, and then being eligible for subsidies. But I do think the stimulus that everyone has been talking about that will be available for communities, some of those pots of money can be used for early education and for school readiness activities. So I think it is important to look at opportunities the stimulus presents and around public and private partnerships for planning and for getting communities together around the issue and developing an action plan.

GOLDBERG: Betty do you want to add to that?

EMARITA: Yes. I think also this might be a really good time to have more cross departmental conversations so that, for example you might have departments that have very different impact on early education and families and children experience. Some departments have policies that have unintended consequences – transportation policies, criminal justice, juvenile justice – and looking at how funds are being expended in those different departments to see if there can be a more holistic view. I think Geoffrey Canada's model, Harlem Children's Zone, is looking at how to have a holistic vision so that the decisions and the practices within different public agencies are designed to build communities rather than stress communities, sometimes unintentionally. I think, in this time, that is really important because we might be in this kind of cycle for awhile and I think we have to learn to really think about this in new ways and invite more people into the conversation.

GOLDBERG: I just want to just mention that one of the speakers, I think, maybe has a cell phone that is close to the regular phone because it is making kind of a feedback noise, so just keep an eye on that. So it is getting close to 3:15 and I don't want to give our participants who are on the call the short stick on getting their questions asked so I want to turn it over now, back to Krista to open it up to questions from the participants.

OPERATOR: At this time the lines are open for questions. If you would like to ask a question please press star (*) one on your telephone keypad to be placed into queue. If you no longer wish to ask your question you may press the pound key (#) to remove yourself from the queue.

GOLDBERG: Do we have any questions yet?

OPERATOR: Our first question comes from the line of Renee Collins. Please proceed with your question. Ms. Collins your line is live.

COLLINS: Pardon?

OPERATOR: You can ask your question now.

COLLINS: Oh okay. I'm sorry. I want to get more information on promoting school readiness but I don't have a Web site address. Is there a Web site address that you can give me so that I can actually look up the information on there so that I can become more familiar with promoting school readiness?

GOLDBERG: At the end of the call I am going to ask each of the speakers to share some other resources and provide Web site links to those resources, unless somebody, one of the speakers wants to provide something immediate right now.

LONG: I am going to check and see. I don't want to give you the wrong address. For Los Angeles one good resource online is www.laup.net and that is what we refer to as L.A. Up. I am looking at the link now. That is the proper one.

COLLINS: I am in south Florida but I am going to look up that information.

LONG: I love south Florida.

GOLDBERG: Ok we can provide more information at the end of the call as well.

COLLINS: Ok. Good enough. Thank you.

OPERATOR: Our next question comes from the line of Wilmern Griffin. Please proceed with your question.

GRIFFIN: I was wondering have the two communities had any support for their initiatives from the local foundation community and/or from the private sector – in other words local businesses. I have another question also.

GOLDBERG: Okay, start with the first.

EMARITA: It is interesting in Minnesota most of the efforts in early education have really been driven by the private sector, by private foundations and by business and by nonprofit organizations and institutions. So it is unique in that way and it also has a lot of variation. We also have a statewide family, friend, and neighbor care network. So there, and that might be a good resource to tap into just too kind of see the kinds of activities that they have been involved in.

O'LEARY: And in Massachusetts in the Boston Thrive and Five plan, United Way of Massachusetts is working with the city to provide funding along with philanthropic dollars. In Springfield, Massachusetts, our third largest city but our second largest school district, a foundation, the Davis Foundation is using its convening power to convene the community around developing a plan for children birth to eight and beyond, and that is called Cherish Every Child. They have helped fund special discrete projects like a scholarship program for early educators. As we know the early educator and the cost is one of the key determinants of quality.

EMARITA: If I could add this as well – in Minnesota a collaboration of eight foundations came together to develop a statewide plan for early education that would guide their investments so there could be more bang for the buck and less duplication, and that it could strategically target, influence, and help build on other efforts going on in the state.

GOLDBERG: Now before we move on to the next question that the gentleman has on the line, I just want to ask Betty if you could talk a little bit on the same topic but how the business community has become involved in this? I understand that the Federal Reserve was also involved in working with you and in bringing businesses on board, and Amy had also mentioned kind of the unlikely ally, so I am just curious if you could speak to that.

EMARITA: One thing that gave our efforts in Minnesota a lot of impact was a 2003 study done by Art Rolnick, vice president at the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, and Rob Grunewald in which they talked about how investments in early education were a better investment, more pay off, than many other economical development strategies. So they really put their reputations and their energy into this and just, I think, really galvanized a lot of efforts around the country because of this report.

O'LEARY: Our campaign is co-chaired by two business leaders. One is Mara Aspinall who is the former president of Genzyme Genetics, a large biotech firm, and she – we talk about that she grows her workforce 20 years out. She is considering who is going to be in the job in 20 years, and we know that those children are sitting in the early education programs across the Commonwealth. So the economic development research is about how the investment pays off, but it is also about developing a productive industry, all the skills you look for, getting along well with others, good judgment, a lot of those skills are, the foundation is being set in preschool and early education.

GOLDBERG: It is too bad that not all business leaders are such long-term thinkers as that.

EMARITA: There is actually an association, Minnesota Business for Early Learning, an organization that really did a lot of advocacy work particularly with the legislature and within the business community on the importance of early education.

GOLDBERG: That is great. So I am sorry to the caller who was in the middle of asking questions, I interrupted, but you can go ahead with the second part of your question.

GRIFFIN: I was wondering how important the speakers feel it is to have support for the students after they start school, for example Saturday programs, afterschool tutoring, summer programs, things like that.

O'LEARY: In Massachusetts, we have the first in the nation Department of Early Education and Care which now is aligned with the two other education agencies and falls kind of structurally under our secretary of education. So we believe that a critical element is looking at education as a continuum starting at birth through college, and to make sure that support and resources are there for children as they move along that continuum, you know, on the local level up to the state level, and that resources are being used effectively to make sure that is happening.

LONG: In Los Angeles one of the things I have been charged to do as deputy mayor is to knit together city resources, county resources, and private endowments to provide those kind of afterschool and support services that our children need using our partnership schools as a laboratory to be able to evaluate and show how those programs knitted together can benefit the families. So my role is not as an education guru here in the city because we do have those, I am more of the village healer. We are, as a city, strongly committed to the fact that we need to provide support services outside of the classroom to engender the kind of connection to education that we are just not finding in our poor communities that we've got to find a way to make not only the services available, but to make the idea of using the different programs sexy, if you will, for lack of a better word. We want people to start demanding and expecting that these kinds of things should be available, and it is really not easy because of our depressed economy, but also because we find in our communities around the partnership schools – and they are the poorest lowest performing schools in the district – that they are burned out by so many failed efforts. So we want to be careful not to overpromise with what we can deliver, but we have made a commitment on behalf of the city now to use every department in the city to turn them toward our schools in an effort to see that our poor children are the priority of each department in some way.

GOLDBERG: And it is a very good question. I know that cities around the country are starting to think about not only preparing children for school but preparing schools for children, and making the transition much easier.

EMARITA: The Annie E. Casey Foundation's Making Connections initiative also has some really wonderful models to look at. Ten states were involved in this and in each of the states there were public-private collaborations that worked across the full range of early education settings from family, friend, and neighbor care to center-based care. They looked both at ready children and ready schools and so on Casey's Web site you will be able to find some really rich information.

GOLDBERG: I think we should turn to see if there are more questions from callers. So Krista, are there other questions?

OPERATOR: Our next question comes from the line of Tammy Weidinger. Please proceed with your question.

GOLDBERG: And if the questioners can also say where you are from that would be helpful too.

WEIDINGER: Okay. This is Tammy Weidinger. I am from Newport, Kentucky. I would love to see a copy of that economic benefits sheet that one of the speakers talked about, maybe even a couple did. That would be a great way for all of us to frame the need for early childhood education.

But my question is – I work in a neighborhood that has, well actually a city, that has a nice continuum of services, both quality center-based care and home visitation and our goal is to engage at least 85 percent of the kids who enter kindergarten and early childhood services. We are currently at 68 percent. So while we are making good strides, we are to the point now where we've truly got to reach those very hardest to stir, hard to reach children. We are finding that they are children in transient families. They are children in families where the parents are very protective, wanting to keep kids close, it is hard to really engage those parents who have isolated themselves and I am wondering if there are any kind of on-the-ground neighborhood-based strategies that any of the speakers know as being particularly successful in reaching out to those families?

EMARITA: A lot of times, well one of the things that has been helpful in some states is working through nonprofit organizations that are culturally rooted in those communities. Sometimes they may be religious institutions. Sometimes they may be neighborhood-based centers, but they are nonprofits that are viewed by that community as authentic as representing their interests, and often times it is much easier for people from those organizations to make those contacts.

LONG: This is Miriam from Los Angeles. I would like to say also that we struggle with that problem and one of the biggest populations that we have trouble reaching is the undocumented. They are not trusting of the system, and I would like to agree with the previous speaker that the ways that we have been successful to the extent that we have and we still have a long way to go, is through working with nonprofits who have authenticity on the ground already.

GOLDBERG: I think we have time for another question, go ahead.

OPERATOR: Our next question comes from the line of Peggy Liuzzi with Child Care Solutions. Please proceed with your question.

LIUZZI: Hi, thank you. I am from Syracuse, New York, and my question is really about efforts to build a continuum of early education services. In New York state we do have a program that has had its political difficulties but it has been growing over the last five years, but we find that sometimes we see other programs closing when pre-K starts. Other programs close because pre-K is publicly funded and our childcare programs are on a tuition basis. What efforts are being done to really build a continuum of choices for parents, so whether they work or don't work, whether they may be using friend, family, and neighbor care, that they have access to services that are going to be a fit for them pulling together school-based programs, Head Start and childcare?

GOLDBERG: Good question. Does anybody want to answer that one?

O'LEARY: Well in Massachusetts we – 70 percent of our three-, four- and five-year-olds were already enrolled in a formal program, whether it be a Head Start, a family childcare provider, public school, or nonprofit organization, so our approach in Massachusetts has been about strengthening the current providers, the public and the private providers, to set a quality standard and to help advocate for the resources and systems to help programs get there. Our secretary has been in place for a year and we are hoping to see that continuum that you spoke about really be built and I think that the local community has a very important part to play in that system. A lot of our work on the state level is making sure that as local communities move forward in this work that whatever recommendations that policies are being set that they are aligned with what is going on at the state level. We know that some communities cannot wait for the state, but we really want to ensure that those policies make sense and are being built on the strength of the system.

EMARITA: And I think that it is an ongoing struggle, and part of it is that our formal systems don't have really good mechanisms for recognizing the quality or for recognizing informal systems or natural learning systems. Because you have a lot of children and informal care is a natural learning system, and I think there is going to be, there is a need to bring a cross-cultural, cross-disciplinary group of people together to really figure out how to better interface those two systems so that children can move more easily from one to the other. There will always be in their community and home and family learning system, which are informal and to the extent that we can create effective bridges from that knowledge base to the formal knowledge base in formal education systems then I think those children will have a much better experience transitioning from one to the other. When you look at what makes effective teaching and what makes effective learning, it is building on what people already know, like how do you recognize what they already know, honor that and build on it.

GOLDBERG: Well unfortunately we are coming to the end of the hour and I don't want to interrupt this very rich conversation because it has been very interesting but we do need to close out the call. We did get started a little bit late. But one last question I have and I have mentioned this before is if you have any resources that you want to share with callers, any Web site links or information if you could say that now and let folks know where they can find more information.

LONG: Would it be possible for me to send those to you by email? I am sorry. I am away from my desk and I don't want to give anybody the wrong address.

GOLDBERG: Sure, that would be fine and we can send that out. So if the other speakers want – if Amy and Betty, if you want to do the same thing we can send out.

EMARITA: I would like to do that and I would also like to encourage people, this in terms of framing this issue, to take a look at McKenzie Group report that was just released in 2009, on the economic impact of the achievement gap in America's schools.

LONG: Yes, that is stunning.

EMARITA: Yes, it is a riveting report.

GOLDBERG: Well thank you and one more thing that I would like to add for callers is to consider joining NLC's Early Care and Education Network. So you can visit our Web site at www.nlc.org/IYEF and you can find out more information about the network and also sign up to receive bimonthly newsletters about different city's strategies in early care and education and also resources and news items on this specific topic.

So I would love to thank everyone for joining the call today and give a great big thanks to our three speakers, Betty, Amy and Miriam, for providing us with such a wonderful and interesting discussion. I hope everyone will join the Institute on our next audioconference which will be focused on youth violence prevention and that is July 23, 2009 at 2:30 p.m. It is called "Ceasefire: An In-Depth Look at Using Street Outreach Workers to Stop the Epidemic of Youth Violence." Thank you again to our speakers, and thank you for joining me.

LONG: It was a delightful experience. Thank you very much.

O'LEARY: Yeah I enjoyed it.

EMARITA: Yes.

GOLDBERG: And everyone else have a great rest of your day. Bye-bye.

LONG: Thank you.

O'LEARY: Bye-bye.

EMARITA: Bye.