Recently I received an invitation from Congressman Harold Ford to attend a meeting at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss legislation he wanted to introduce in Congress. The Prekindergarten Oriented Professional Support (P-KOPS) Act is the name of the legislation. Its purpose is to increase access to high-quality, prekindergarten education by competitively funding early educator positions. The meeting was cancelled when Congressman Ford was called back to Washington, D.C.

If this meeting had been held, I was prepared to ask Ford to modify his legislation to include funding for scholarships so early childhood educators could obtain their Associate or Bachelor’s degrees. This Act was focused on teachers working with 3- and 4-year-old children. It was going to suggest that we also need help with professionals teaching children younger than age 3. I agree with Congressman Ford about the need to attract and retain qualified early childhood teachers. We are all aware of the high turnover rate of the preschool workforce and the negative effect this has on children.

I met an early childhood teacher at a Georgia conference who had just moved from Pennsylvania. She had the Delaware Valley Association for the Education of Young Children send me a video they produced about their Worthy Wage Program and some information about a statewide compensation initiative called Quality Early Education Through Salaries and Training (QUEST). This initiative is very much like the W.A.G.E. and T.E.A.C.H. programs that started in North Carolina and have now been adopted by a number of states. The component of QUEST that I am most impressed with is the provision for forgiveness of up to $10,000 in student loans for degree teachers who go to work in licensed early childhood education centers.

I think Head Start is right on target by investing resources in requiring lead teachers to have an Associate Degree. I would love to see a local early education association in one of our Southern states at age of having every early childhood educator in the community have at least a CDA. The group could team up with Head Start and get their city and county governments to buy into the idea as well as the Chamber of Commerce, the public schools, and United Way. With 100% of their workforce holding some type of credential, the
Brain Research and Childhood Education: Implications for Educators (Summer 2002).
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